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60th year of publication

Latin American populism – between left and right

Harry der Nederlanden

"A spectre has arisen, one of anti-American nationalism," pronounced *The Economist* portentously on the news of Ecuador's eviction of Occidental Petroleum and its seizure of a large segment of its oil resources. The move followed closely on the heels of the "nationalization" of the energy sector in Bolivia, which in turn followed the pattern set by Venezuela's Hugo Chavez.

Depending on their bias, other commentators have warned of the rise of socialist radicals to power in Latin America or have celebrated the emergence of a new left consensus or even of a renaissance of the left. Writing in the leftist magazine *The Nation*, Greg Grandin welcomed the rise of a bloc of nations that he estimates includes almost 60 per cent of the population of Latin America to oppose the so-called "Washington consensus" which he describes as "a euphemism for the mix of punishing fiscal austerity, privatization and market liberalization that has produced staggering levels of poverty and inequality over the past three decades." He groups all the left-leaning administrations in Latin America as part of a consensus or loose alliance against globalization and the power of the U.S.

A number of other analysts echo the influential essay, "Latin America's Left Turn" (*Foreign Affairs*) by Jorge G. Castaneda, a former Foreign Minister for Mexico: it argues there are two lefts at work in Latin America. There is a distinct backlash against the free-market reforms of the last 15 years, he says. But the left-wing wave that has hit the continent is not a tsunami. Many of those that Grandin groups with Hugo Chavez (Venezuela) and Evo Morales (Bolivia), he says, differ in important respects: they belong to an older left, a chastened and reconstructed left that emphasizes social policies like education, antipoverty programs, healthcare and housing within a more or less orthodox market framework. It has given up its radical vision of a wholesale revolution and state ownership.

Alan Garcia running for President of Peru

The flamboyant populist left represented by Chavez, says Castenada, is very different – "often virulently anticommunist, always authoritarian..., and much more interested in policy as an instrument for attaining and conserving power than in power as a tool for making policy." These leaders tend to make deals with big business to get their hands on money to redistribute as a way to curry popular favor.

Castaneda leaves no doubt where his sympathies lie. He sees the moderate, constitutional leftism of countries like Chile as indispensable for a region with huge disparities in wealth, widespread poverty and still-weak democratic traditions.

The populist left, he generalizes, loves power more than democracy and tends to take control of the media and of the two other branches of government, the legislature and the judiciary. This is true of both Chavez and Morales. Alvaro Vargas Llosa, the author of *Liberty for Latin America: How to Undo Five Hundred Years of State Oppression*, stresses that for Latin American society to flourish, it must, among other things, develop more respect for law by those in power, greater respect for democratic institutions, and resist the temptation to concentrate power in the hands of the few. The populist left fails on all counts.

Populism and corporatism

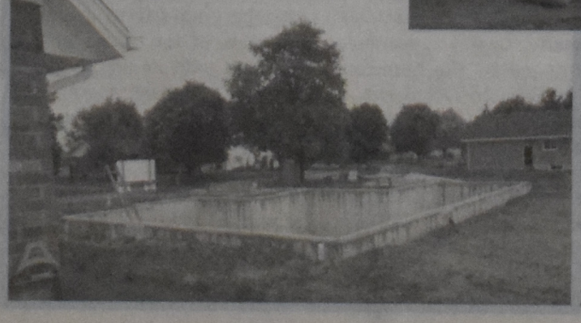
Some, in fact, suggest that to speak of all the leftist governments in terms of a swing to the left misses more than it captures. Populist movements in Latin America have relied on charismatic, one-man leadership, or demagogues, if you will, who seek to establish a direct bond with their followers rather than through structured parties. They tend to blur the distinction between leader, party, government and state. Many of them project a strong man image and have a military background. They appeal strongly to nationalist sentiment and inveigh against foreigners, elites and capitalists. "There is nothing inherently left-wing about populism," asserts the article from *The Economist*, from which I garnered much of this summary. "Some leaders were closer to fascism."

Samuel Gregg, Director of Research at the Acton Institute, prefers the label *corporatism* to describe what has been happening in Venezuela, Bolivia and some other Latin American countries. He, too, sees affinities with fascism. Corporatism, he says, "blends state authoritarianism, populism, nationalism and anti-foreign xenophobia. This is combined

Continued on page 3...

House for Sale

Christian school supporters in southwest Ontario made headlines in three local papers. Volunteers gathered around a bare basement on the morning of May 12 and by the end of the next day the house – Covenant Home – had walls and a roof. A long list of volunteers dedicated their time, talents and resources to build a 1600 sq. ft. home in Dresden, Ontario. Profits from the sale of the home will go to a Christian school in a village in the Dominican Republic and to Ebenezer Christian School in Chatham. Apocalipsis Christian School in Bermajo, D.R. is in dire need of two more classrooms and a large assembly room. The school also serves as a community center.



Covenant Home is a pilot project of Worldwide Christian Schools, and it was hugely successful.

Politics

Civitas 2006

Principalities & Powers
David T. Koyzis

Three months ago I received an unexpected invitation from Lorne Gunter, a columnist for the *National Post* and the *Edmonton Journal*, to speak at the 10th annual conference of the Civitas Society, which styles itself "a society where ideas meet." This was after he had read an article I wrote for the Work Research Foundation's *Comment* last year, titled, "The city and its renewal," which had recently come out in the periodical's print edition. I hadn't known much about Civitas other than in the pages of Lloyd Mackey's *The Pilgrimage of Stephen Harper*, which I had read not too long before. From this I knew that Civitas was a small-c conservative think tank bringing together a number of prominent politicians, political staffers, academics and journalists of a generally "right-wing" persuasion. The invitation came as something of a surprise, because my cities article did not seem obviously to fit into a right-wing mould, as that is usually understood nowadays. Yet I was pleased to accept.

I arrived in Ottawa Thursday afternoon after a six-hour drive from Hamilton. The following morning I attended Question Period in the House of Commons, with my friend and protégé, Eric Hogeterp, a Redeemer University College graduate who works for the Minister of Industry. I was honored to have David Sweet, the new Member of Parliament for Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Westdale, come down to greet me in the hallway near the Peace Tower. Though I myself do not live in his riding, Redeemer is located there. Of course, cameras and other electronic devices are not allowed in the Commons chamber, but because the Senate was not in session, I was able to photograph the impressive interior of the Red Chamber, as well as the gallery of portraits of Canada's monarchs just outside.

After this I drove to the Brookstreet Hotel in Kanata, where Civitas was meeting. During the reception that evening, Prime Minister Stephen Harper made an unscheduled appearance. I cannot recall how long he stayed, but it took some time for everyone who wished to meet him to do so. I myself was privileged to talk with him briefly and shake his hand. After Harper and his entourage left, John Baird, the President of the Treasury Board, made an overtly partisan speech, with barbed humor at the expense of the various Liberal leadership hopefuls.

Saturday morning saw the first of the sessions, devoted to "Property Rights: the most fundamental freedom," followed by a session on a topic that at first glance might not seem obviously related to the previous: "Euthanasia: the next battle in the culture wars." In fact, however, both sessions brought out the barely latent tensions between two principal factions in the conservative coalition, the libertarians and what might be called the social or traditional conservatives. The former are individualists to the core, preferring to minimize government control to the greatest extent possible. As such, they champion the free market and are usually willing to tolerate abortion, euthanasia and other activities on which the social conservatives deem it necessary to legislate. After all, if we have property rights over our own bodies, why not allow euthanasia? As one participant put it, if our bodies are not ours to do with as we see fit, they belong to the state. Yet I heard no one make a case for allowing individuals to sell themselves into slavery, which indicates that even libertarians are not willing to follow entirely the logic of their own ideas.

The luncheon remarks by Frank Luntz, a Republican Party strategist from south of the border, were the most controversial and were picked up by the domestic media. Harper's meeting with Luntz a day earlier would be the subject of opposition criticism during the following Monday's Question Period. The title of Luntz' talk, "Massaging the Conservative Message for Voters," carried all the flavor of an ad campaign proposal. Subtleties and nuances may be the mark of academic discourse, but they can only cloud an election campaign. Luntz' basic message? Keep it simple, hammer the opposition, and hire me next time. Incidentally, Luntz' appearance was arranged by the Manning Centre for Building Democracy, a partisan think tank associated with the federal Conservative Party.

The other four sessions dealt with the role of the courts in democracies, foreign and defence policies, electoral reform, and the future of Canadian cities. The schedule was tightly packed, leaving little time to catch one's breath. For example, I would also like to have heard more on electoral reform, since I have a longstanding interest in the subject. But I thought it best to cut out a little early to prepare for the session on cities, in which I myself was participating. In fact, I was the final speaker at the conference. Knowing this in advance, I feared I would be addressing a vastly reduced assembly, as some were present for only one day. Yet this was not the case: even the last session drew a fairly large turnout.

I shall resist the temptation to engage in name-dropping, though it would be easy to do for such an event. Suffice it to say that there was a large number of well-known people – scarcely less well known than the Prime Minister himself. Representatives of a number of vaguely kindred organizations were also present, including one from the Association of Women Shooters of Canada! Perhaps not surprisingly, I felt more comfortable with the traditional conservatives, even if I myself am loath to wear that label. I found myself less in agreement with the positions of the libertarians, though I found at least one of these to be quite likable as a person.

At the end of the day, I was left wondering whether everyone present really had that much in common. Catholics, neocalvinists and traditionalists who speak the language of natural law, creation order and moral order respectively would not seem immediately to share much with those who view the state as little more than a constant threat to their own individual autonomy. In fact, there are professed socialists with whom at least *this* neocalvinist would have more in common. In my *Political Visions and Illusions* I point out the protean character of conservatism, especially the desire of different professed adherents to conserve a variety of perceived and conflicting goods. This is particularly notable with respect to a view of the state. Unlike liberalism with its contractarian theory of the state, there is no single, philosophically coherent account of political order that can obviously claim the conservative label. If there was a common definition of conservatism at Civitas, it seemed to revolve around, not so much the respect for tradition and the accumulated wisdom of the ages, as smaller government and lower taxes – a somewhat deracinated agenda that would be largely incomprehensible to European conservatives of, say, the 19th and early 20th centuries, and even to Canadian conservatives of an earlier generation. In short, Civitas illustrates both the virtues and defects of the conservative movement(s) in this country. In this it is no different from the partisans of the rival political perspectives.

I was told that this particular Civitas conference was more evidently partisan than its predecessors. For the first time since Civitas was founded there is a large-C Conservative government in office. Even the taste of power can be a heady experience. How long will it all last? Luntz tantalized his audience with the prospect of maintaining power for 20 years. My admittedly unprofessional advice? Don't put away the coats and hats too soon. After all, this is only a minority government.

Red Chamber

Koyzis and Harper

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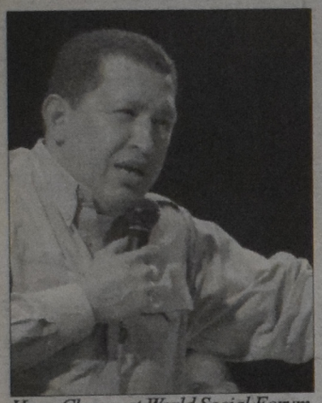
Latin American populism ... *continued from page 1*



Hugo Chavez at World Social Forum

with extensive nationalization and regulation of the economy, the militarization of much of society, and the creation of state-controlled civil organizations that gradually suffocate any autonomous free associations."

Does it make any difference how we label political developments in Latin America? Yes, I think it is important to see that what is happening is not simply a resurgence of old Marxist ideology and Communist agitators. The extreme inequality, poverty, and the concentration of wealth and power in these countries have not abated under free market and democratic reforms. As a consequence, the poor masses, which in the Andean countries includes almost all the indigenous peoples, have become cynical about democratic ideals. They are desperate for an alternative, and in the short term Chavez and Morales seem to provide a more hopeful future. Critics, however, fear that in the long run they are undermining the very institutions that provide for a healthy political and economic life.

The Peruvian election

Maxwell A Cameron, looking at the Peruvian election (scheduled after we go to print) in which one candidate has aligned himself with Chavez, warns that it would be a mistake "to frame the decision as a choice between social democracy and radical populism." Ollanta Humala, a military man who has expressed his admiration for Chavez and received his emphatic support, also wants to nationalize the country's oil and gas resources. However, says Cameron, he is much less radical than Chavez. Vargas Llosa, however, warned that Humala would mean a return to authoritarianism and subjugation of the press.

The other main candidate, Alan Garcia, served a term as president a few years ago, and in his previous incarnation he was himself a populist. After the failure of his radical policies, however, he embraced a more moderate approach. Both candidates, however, will probably concentrate power in some way, Cameron believes.

Many business people gravitate toward Garcia, not because he is right wing but because they are afraid of Chavez's radicalism. They are afraid that such policies would threaten the 5.5 percent growth rate the country has seen over the last four years. However, this growth has brought very little in improvements to the life of the poor in Peru.

Politics in Peru has become so directionless and fragmented that it has given rise to 36 political parties, many of them regional. Polls indicate that 70 percent of Peruvians are fed up with democracy.

Ecuador's oil grab

Ecuador's recent eviction of the large American oil company Occidental Petroleum and the seizure of its assets has been interpreted as part of the Latin American swing to the left. Occidental produced about 20 per cent of the oil in the country.

As in Bolivia and Venezuela, the move is very popular among the poor, who are convinced (with some justification) that rich multinationals are ripping off their natural resources with very little benefit to them. All across Latin America people are being taught that multinationals and capitalism are the producers of poverty rather than of wealth, so nationalization looks like a good idea. In the past, it led to the withdrawal of investment and invariably left the country poorer. With oil in such high demand, however, especially by China, that may not be an obstacle this time.

Morales working the crowd

Occidental has filed for $1 billion in damages, which it may yet get. And the U.S. has broken off trade negotiations. But Chavez stepped into the gap and sealed a deal with Ecuador to refine its oil at a cut rate.

Colombia's Uribe – an exception?

The decisive victory of incumbent President Alvaro Uribe in Colombia – he carried 62 per cent of the vote – was touted in many headlines as bucking the trend toward the left in Latin America. The *Christian Science Monitor* referred to him as "Colombia's conservative president." It is true that he has aligned himself with the U.S. against the drug traffickers. But the combination of leftist rebels and drug warlords had made Colombia into one of the most dangerous countries in the world. Uribe is popular because he has managed to bring security to the cities and towns by acting decisively against the rebels. At the same time, he has also gone a long way toward dismantling the right-wing paramilitaries responsible for many of the assassinations.

The rebel attacks and depredations, the horrific homicide and kidnapping rate – these were the big issues for the Colombian people, and Uribe delivered on these. He has made most of the cities and town safe from the rebels and has cut the homicide rate by 23 per cent and kidnappings 62 per cent.

However, he is far from being a conservative in any meaningful sense of the word. Over half of Colombians live in deep poverty and he will be expected to do something about distributing the wealth more equitably. Although he has some of the earmarks of a populist and an authoritarian, Uribe has pledged not to follow Chavez' example. Maybe that, plus the absence of anti-American rhetoric, makes him look like a conservative to some. But his rise has been at the expense of the two main parties, the Liberals and the Conservatives.

Latin America continues to be the world's most unequal region. A recent UN study has argued that a lack of development among the poor of a nation is a large obstacle to the production of wealth. Castaneda points to Chile's example. There direct subsidies to the poor have helped cut poverty by 65 per cent since 1990, according to the New York Times, while maintaining a decent rate of growth.

Alvaro Uribe

Despite Chavez's nationalization of the oil industry, despite the windfall oil profits, despite an elaborate system to distribute this wealth to the poor (which makes them indebted directly to him), Venezuela is not doing well, not economically and not in other respects either. Unemployment and crime have risen sharply and so has police violence. Poverty is still on the rise.

Perhaps in the utopian rhetoric of Chavez and Morales, the poor of Latin America are grasping at illusory solutions, but they are not signs of the victory of Marxist ideology; they are rather signs of the failure of free-market reform without good governance and other remedies to raise the poor. It is good to give people hope; it is even better to give them good reason to hope.

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Editorial

The cardinal and Bob Dylan

Harry der Nederlanden

Our youngest son, a junior at Calvin College, is home for the summer holidays. I bought him a book by a literary scholar whom I became acquainted with when studying 17th century lit many years ago. Christopher Ricks has written extensively on Milton, but also on Victorian and modern poets. No, my son isn't an English major, but like almost all kids today he listens to popular music, so when I happened on a book about a rock musician written by a literary critic I admired, I thought, "Who knows – this might ring a bell with Jonathan." The title of the book: *Dylan's Visions of Sin*. Those of you who, like me, don't listen to popular music very much may nevertheless know the name of Bob Dylan, because he is one of those artists who has managed to exploit the rhythms and sounds of rock to address fundamental themes.

Sure enough, a couple of days after Jon's homecoming, after nearly tripping over a box of his computer equipment still parked in the middle of the family room, I looked out the window and there was Jon – sitting outside in a lawn chair, catching a few rays and reading Ricks on Dylan. One of the speakers of our stereo had been propped up near the dining room window and was pumping Bob Dylan songs out through the open window as he read. Jon doesn't have a lot of CDs of his own, but he found some Bob Dylan in the local library.

Yes, you caught me – congratulating myself for finding a book that has caught the interest of one of my kids. I admit to being something of a bibliomaniac myself, and although I have no desire to infect my kids with the same pathology, I do buy them books occasionally. (Used books. I'm trying to instill frugal Dutch habits: used books and used shirts. Save your money for new underwear.)

Hearing a crash outside, I look out the window again to see Jon flinging pieces of wood up into the maple tree. A cardinal had been fluting noisily, joyfully high in the crown of the tree, making the neighborhood ring with his delight at the gorgeous Spring weather. Disconcerted, I hollered, "What are you trying to do – kill one of my favorite songbirds?"

"No, I'm just trying to get him to sing somewhere else. He's so loud, he's drowning out Bob Dylan."

That'd be a first, wouldn't it – a songbird drowning out a rock singer! What a contrast: the rough raspy voice and plaintive tunes of Dylan over against the joyous, almost triumphant yodel of the cardinal. No doubt, the bird was fluting his boldest, clearest notes across the treetops and housetops to attract a mate and join enthusiastically in the new cycle of life. Meanwhile, down below, in his inimitable dry, raspy voice Bob Dylan was singing about the brokenness and harshness of human life. It's true, the two definitely clashed.

I got to thinking. The cardinal, which invariably finds the highest perch in the neighborhood, whether T.V. antenna or tree, from which to broadcast his jubilant doxologies, is clearly a Kuyperian triumphalist. Perhaps that's why my son was tossing sticks at him. In this postmodern era, triumphalism and surveying the cosmos from a transcendental perspective are definitely out of fashion. Bod Dylan, on the other hand, speaks achingly from out of the depths of the broken, fallen human condition.

Similarly, at the beginning of the 20th century Kierkegaard complained that western philosophers (by which he meant mostly the great Germans and their disciples) encouraged us to think like kings who live in palaces. He, on the other hand, was determined to think from the humble perspective of the shack of human existence.

We live at the tail end of a long process of western reflection on the human condition that has followed in the footsteps of Kierkegaard. Thinkers, scholars and artists have thought it necessary to ignore or bracket out any presumed knowledge of transcendental castles, of an abiding cosmic order, to recover what they complained had been lost – the bodily, social, workaday person simply trying to make his way through the ordinary world, a world of shacks oppressed by castles perched on high hills.

I apologize to our neighborhood cardinal and his entire class for associating him with a tradition of philosophers that have fallen out of favor, but the best of them sang some grand and eloquent songs, though without much melody. Paradoxically, many of those who sang out of the finitude, pain and deformities of human existence, sang more artfully than the cosmoscopists. Certainly, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and many existentialists did.

These musings were in the back of my mind as I read through my thick file of articles collected in recent months about Latin America. A *Foreign Affairs* article by Jorge Castaneda sketching the pernicious effects of utopian and populist traditions on Latin American politics caught my eye. I drew on it for the front page story of this issue. Castaneda is himself a committed Leftist, but one who has labored mightily for many years to purge his tradition of its contempt for the slow democratic processes and structures and of its predilection for grandiose, romantic visions of wholesale transformation. He has tried hard to marry a certain level of respect for the legalities and stability of democratic institutions and free market mechanisms with the imperatives for social and economic reform needed across Latin America to raise the masses out of desperate poverty.

He is deeply worried by what he sees as the return of utopianism in the political rhetoric of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, Evo Morales in Bolivia and other rising populist leaders. Another courageous Peruvian journalist, Gustavo Gorriti, who managed to survive the repressions of what he calls Latin America's 30 years of civil war, agrees with Castaneda's assessment of the destructive effects of the romanticized left as represented by Castro and Che Gueverra. He writes that the Left in Latin America for years modelled itself on Castro's guerrilla insurgency, *hoping to extend it across all of Latin America (and the Caribbean). This itinerant war lasted for 30 years (surviving still, in varying degrees of intensity, in Guatemala, Colombia, Peru), killed half a million people, displaced at least 3 million more (as internal or external refugees), and contributed (from the mid-1960s through the late 1970s) to the chain breakdown of democratic regimes and their replacement (usually) by brutal dictatorships committed to counterinsurgency. The war killed, or spiritually maimed, all too many promising young Latin intellectuals and consumed others in the process, causing them to neglect, or forget, the larger world for much too long. This was a generation lost to its own ideals and dreams (half-baked, poorly thought out, though sincere) which lived to see them largely disproved in defeat.*

Gorriti aptly describes this tragic enterprise, which brought 30 years of internal warfare to Latin America, as "the revolutionary equivalent of their silver bullet, to perfect their philosopher's stone." These young revolutionaries were inspired and encouraged by a talented generation of Latin American writers – poets, novelists, intellectuals – who celebrated this vision of a new utopian order that would arise out of the violent destruction of the old.

The procedural democracy that we take for granted, and that was contemptuously dismissed as false and empty by the idealists, was gradually – and painfully – rediscovered by the Left in Latin America and recognized to be instead "a rich operating system without which civilized life would remain only a distant dream for those removed from power." After a couple of decades in which Latin American politicians and voters have slowly begun to develop respect for fundamental legalities and mechanisms of democratic change, intellectuals like Castaneda and Gorriti are anxious that the demagoguery of populists leaders like Chavez and Morales are threatening this fragile progress.

Ironically, while these secular thinkers, themselves Leftists, are warning against this populist rhetoric, organizations like the World Council of Churches and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches come awfully close to cultivating it. There are all too many points of convergence between the anti-capitalist, anti-free-market, anti-globalist, anti-American rhetoric of the populist leaders and of ecumenical leaders of mainline Protestantism. Of course, the latter, mostly based in the North, are fighting against what they see as the utopianism of the neo-conservative New American Century and its ambitious plan to transform the Middle East.

Unlike the poor of Latin America, most of the well-to-do in the rich democracies, are repudiating any appeal to grand utopian stories of progress, enlightenment, and universal prosperity. In fact, we're in danger of losing all belief in overarching ideals or norms. Our politics is increasingly seen as a selfish squabble over the bounties of the public trough. We can use a little fluting from on high by a bright eyed cardinal. (Pope John Paul II was such a Cardinal.) Ironically, nowadays as we warn our cynical postmodernist neighbors that mankind and politics cannot do without norms, we find among our allies neo-Marxist thinkers similarly worried about the loss of all transcendental perspective.

We need both the doxological rhapsodies of the cardinal perched in the highest treetops and the rasping complaints of those bent under the weight of life. Holding them together, however, is a tricky business. We are too quickly tempted to fling sticks and stones at one or the other.

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Letters

Satan's bite not as bad as his roar?

Marian Van Til (letter May 29) took issue with my interpretation of Matthew 10:28 (column May 15), which says, "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell." I interpreted "the One" to refer to Satan, and Marian says, " the One" refers to God. Upon rereading this passage I conclude that Marian is right and I am wrong. I must admit that I have always misinterpreted this passage. I guess I was overly impressed by Satan's roaring as he goes about like a lion seeking to devour his prey. Marian will like my mentioning the fact that we have a saying on our bulletin board at home that we copied from a front lawn sign somewhere. It reads: "When a man is in a place where a woman can't hear him, is he still wrong?" One of my daughters-in-law scribbled underneath it: "Of course. Was there ever any doubt?"

Bert Witvoet
St. Catharines, Ont.

Letter to Ivan

In reply to Harry Antonides letter to Jeanetter on Afghanistan, Koos Schipper penned the following fictional letter a Russian soldier might have written to his nephew.

[Translated from Russian:]

Dear nephew

In your last letter you asked me why I and so many other Soviet men fought in Afghanistan. The answer is very simple. We were trying to protect a legitimate progressive government against its CIA-backed enemies. This government was trying to accomplish the following: 1. Bring literacy to the masses. 2. Improve the conditions of women oppressed by Islamic reactionaries. 3. Raise life expectancy and improve health care, especially for poor people. 4. Modernize the country and develop its economy.

Although the American imperialists dismissed these claims as propaganda, they only needed to compare Afghanistan with the five Central Asian Soviet Republics to realize that we were sincere. These five Republics are Islamic and the people are of the same basic stock as those in Afghanistan, but they are much more literate, prosperous and healthy than the hapless Afghans. In those five Republics, 13-year-old girls are in school instead of being married off to some older man.

Unfortunately, our good intentions, although recognized by ordinary Afghans, provoked the fury of the most reactionary elements of Islam, such as the Taliban and foreigners like Osama Bin Laden. These Islamic reactionaries received generous support from the American imperialists, who didn't give a damn about Afghans of course, but who were only interested in making our brave men bleed.

Eventually, the costs in life and money became too high for us, and so we withdrew our troops. The result was the take-over of Afghanistan by those American-backed reactionaries and rapacious warlords, who promptly proceeded to turn the clock back.

Incredibly, the American imperialists and their Canadian, Dutch and other lackeys are now in Afghanistan themselves and fighting against the same people whom they once supported in every possible way. Even more incredibly, they are arguing that they are only trying to bring freedom and democracy to the Afghans.

Such brazen hypocrisy is truly breath-taking. But then, we already knew, didn't we, that there are no greater hypocrites in the world than those self-proclaimed defenders of freedom and democracy. It is a miracle that there are still people in the world who take American propaganda at face value.

Very well, dear nephew, now you know why your uncle fought in Afghanistan. We were motivated by the highest ideals and deep concern for the Afghans, unlike the American, Canadian and other mercenaries, who are only obeying orders.

Affectionately yours.

The truth content in the above is at least as great as in what Mr. Antonides wrote to Jeannette.

Koos Schipper

Enemies

In his articles "All his enemies and mine" John Bolt posits that "When someone declares himself to be our enemy, he starts to define us; his hatred of us requires that we acknowledge him as our enemy, even if we desperately want to be his friend." (CC, May 15). That may sound like a truism, but it is not. I can't help when someone declares me to be his enemy, but that does not define me completely. Nor does it logically follow that I now must regard that person as my enemy. It is even less true that "Our enemy makes us define ourselves on his terms." Apart from God, who gives the ultimate definition, there are other people who define me. At issue here is by how much do I let myself be defined. Do I allow others to define me or not. Bolt, without evidence, assumes that they do. This flawed assumption undermines his argument. He argues too much in black and white, ignoring here that there are many shades of gray.

Bolt also refers to Romans 5:10, "while we were enemies" of God. As he points out, through Christ we have become reconciled, but he does not apply that adequately to our relationship with our "enemies." Put differently, the vertical reconciliation seems to have no bearing on the horizontal aspect. Sorry to say that Bolt's flawed logic and inadequate theology have not impressed me.

Yours truly,
Bert den Boggende, Brooks, AB

Will we work for "a fair deal" for vulnerable Canadians?

The non-partisan Task Force on Modernizing Income Security for Working-Age Adults (MISWAA) is making a major contribution to the ongoing debate on how the federal and Ontario governments should and could effectively help numerous working-age Canadians living in poverty. In Ontario alone, almost 900,000 adults aged 18-64 fall below the poverty line. They either work in minimum-wage jobs, often only part-time, or they rely on inadequate welfare benefits.

In its provocative report, *Time for a Fair Deal*, a high profile, Toronto-based, independent coalition of bankers, labor leaders, university professors, lawyers, economists, researchers, and community activists have jointly presented significant recommendations on how both Ottawa and Queen's Park can and must soon introduce sweeping measures to help eventually eliminate (rather sooner than later) the deepening and spreading poverty in Canada.

The Report rightly recommends the early removal of devastatingly discriminatory barriers to Employment Insurance benefits and, as well, the long-overdue, substantial improvement of essential family-support programs, especially for people too disabled to work. Indeed, Ontario should willingly provide dental coverage and adequate child benefits for all low-income parents, including those forced on welfare.

As David Pecaut, chair of the influential Toronto City Summit Alliance and co-chair of the MISWAA Task Force, reportedly reminded policy-makers and citizens alike: "We are a rich country and we have the capacity to do this. This comes back to a question of will. Is this community, Toronto, the GTA, Ontario, Canada willing to step up and see a fair deal for our low-income citizens?"

Susan Pigott, Task Force co-chair and chief executive of the front line St. Christopher House, rightly declared: "Improving the standard of living for people of low-income is a social-justice issue but it's also one of economic self interest."

Governments are busy putting money into health care, education, fighting crime, helping troubled neighborhoods, economic development and training to replace an aging workforce. Having hundred of thousands of people living in deep poverty undermines all those efforts, Pigott said.

Keep in mind, the federal government is constantly piling up more surpluses in the Employment Insurance fund as well as in its general income accounts (partly due to sharply rising gasoline revenues). As a result, the Harper-led Conservatives, in active cooperation with the solidarity-minded New Democratic, Liberal and Bloc Mps, should immediately introduce legislative, policy, regulatory and budget measures that would unequivocally demonstrate their respective, stated political commitments to Canada's struggling working families.

Especially since many families are obviously in desperate need of equitable federal and provincial income-supports and socio-economic investments, such as adequate, affordable housing and high quality child care, they urgently need these life-essentials for their health and well being.

Canada's credibility and reputation, seeking to build a mutually caring and generously sharing country that is clearly committed to the public common good of all, hang in the balance. Jesus' love-command is directly relevant: "Always, in everything, treating others (doing justice, showing mercy and solidarity) as we would like to be treated by them."

We all must help to eliminate the economic, educational, environmental and social deficits that increasingly plague so many fellow-Canadians. They are now forced to face intolerable crises.

Self-respecting governments, political parties, social movements and all citizens must unitedly act to end these costly and morally unacceptable scandals. Such disgraces hurt and scar vulnerable people for life. They seriously damage Canada for which we are duty-bound to stand on guard.

Clearly the Fair Deal Coalition's demands require united, effective political action now.

Gerald Vandezande
Toronto, ON

Christian Courier

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War and peace, church and state

Gerald Vandezande and Mark Vander Vennen

On May 17, 2006, the Canadian Parliament debated a motion put forward by Prime Minister Stephen Harper to extend Canada's military role in Afghanistan to 2009 (see box for the text of the motion). The motion rightly identifies the multi-dimensional nature of the issues surrounding the Afghanistan conflict – issues involving reducing poverty, protecting human rights, enhancing gender equality, strengthening civil society and ensuring good governance.

As Parliamentarians – many of them Christians – groped for real answers in this and subsequent debates, what frameworks of understanding, what perspectives on justice, peace, responsibility, safety and the meaning of life informed their reflections?

As Christian citizens deeply concerned about these issues, how do we offer to decision-makers perspectives and alternatives rooted in the Gospel of shalom?

In the May 1 issue of *Christian Courier*, criticizing the War and Peace report coming to the CRC synod in June, 2006, Dr. John Bolt of Calvin Seminary asserts in "All His Enemies and Mine: Our Twofold Enemy and Twofold War" that the report "confuses the two realms of church and government." He argues that "we should not set up impossible standards for civil authority that cripples its ability to deal justly with terrorists." He then claims: "It is not the task of governments and militaries to bring *gospel shalom* to the world [italics his]. They can't and shouldn't try. That is the task of the church and Christian believers. Governments do not carry Bibles but the sword." This dualistic view of life implies that justice – the mandate God gives God's "servants" (Romans 13), and an abiding message throughout Scripture – does not belong to "gospel shalom". That theological approach invites one-dimensional, militaristic interventions that inevitably lead to worsening insecurity, desperate poverty and the greater marginalization of vulnerable people – the very realities that the Parliamentary resolutions seeks to avoid.

An integrated, justice-shaped approach would build on the international consensus arrived at with the Afghanistan government and many others in the 2006 "The Afghanistan Compact" (arrived at in London, February 1, 2006), a framework for international cooperation over the next five years. There it was recognized that a counter-insurgency military solution aimed at rooting out and killing insurgents has not and will not work. A long-term, justice-shaped commitment to sustained economic, social, political and security or protection measures designed to help create conditions conducive to human safety and well-being has a far better chance of success.

While obviously more dialogue and work needs to happen, the report to the 2006 Synod on War and Peace contains crucial openings in this direction. It recognizes that inclusive justice and peace are at the heart of "gospel shalom". All of us who are searching for life-affirming, nation-building ways out – government decision-makers, military personnel, NGO workers, and citizens – desperately need the perspectives that flow from gospel shalom, for which Jesus gave his life. As the contemporary testimony "Our World Belongs to God" pointedly reminds us: "We call on governments to do public justice and to protect the freedoms and rights of individuals, groups and institutions, so that each may freely do the tasks God gives. We urge governments to ensure the well-being of all citizens.... Following the Prince of Peace, we are called to be peacemakers, and to promote harmony and good order. We call on our governments to work for peace; we deplore the arms race and the horrors that we risk.... We pledge to walk in ways of peace, confessing that our world belongs to God; he is our sure defense" (Art. 54, 55).

The Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister) moved:

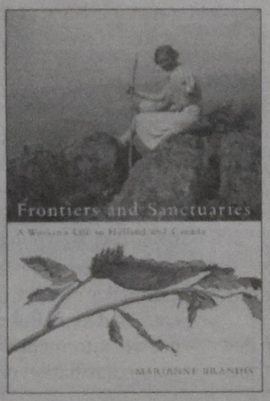
That,
(1) whereas the House on April 10, 2006 debated a motion in support of Canada's significant commitment in Afghanistan;
(2) whereas Canada's commitment in Afghanistan is an important contribution, with that of more than 30 other countries, to international efforts under the auspices of the United Nations and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO);
(3) whereas these international efforts are reducing poverty, enhancing human rights and gender equality, strengthening civil society and helping to build a free, secure and self-sustaining democratic state for all Afghan men, women and children; and
(4) whereas Canada's commitment in Afghanistan is consistent with Canada's support of freedom, democracy, the rule of law and human rights around the world;
the House support the government's two year extension of Canada's deployment of diplomatic, development, civilian police and military personnel in Afghanistan and the provision of funding and equipment for this extension.

Gerald Vandezande, C.M., is the author of Justice, Not Just Us: Faith Perspectives and National Priorities, *edited by Mark Vander Vennen.*

Mark Vander Vennen has been engaged in peace and conflict issues for over 25 years

Frontiers and sanctuaries – a woman's life in Holland and Canada

Marten A Mol

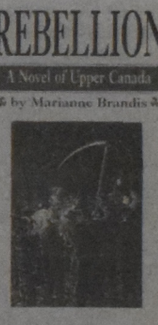


"Her writings about immigration connected at every point with our experiences as a family, and as five individual immigrants" wrote Marianne Brandis about her mother Madzy Brender a' Brandis. The new book *Frontiers and Sanctuaries – A Woman's Life in Holland and Canada* is one of the best books I have had the pleasure of reading. It touched my heart. An amazing immigration story coming to life through the eyes of a mother, author, writer, artist, student, wife, as well as her husband and children. Marianne Brandis arrived in Canada as a young nine-year-old girl with the family to become a renowned journalist and award winning author. Her books include juvenile novels *The Tinderbox, The Quarter Pie Window, The Sign of the Scales, Fire Ship, Rebellion: A Novel of Upper Canada* and a book on writing *Finding Words: a Writer's Memoir*. Her two brothers too became creative artists in their own right and walked interesting paths.

Marianne has written a deep and fascinating book about her mother and family life, mostly through the shared intimate writings of her mother Madzy. There is no doubt that mother Madzy was special not only in the eyes of her children but to so many other people with whom her life intertwined in this fascinating book. Madzy's life encompasses the worlds of Indonesia, of New York where she got married before the Second World War, of Holland during the war, losing her husband for three years to the POW camps in Germany with three children to look after. Then, having experienced a little of Canada during their early marriage on trips from New York, they return to Canada and settled in Terrace, in northern BC to farm.

This was a quantum leap for both Madzy and her husband Bill. Life here was completely different from life in Maarn, Holland: here forests, mountains and self-sufficiency were the major mainstays of the land. Although in large part about their experiences as immigrants and growing their family, the book has lots more to offer. The deeply emotional yet reserved writing about the reality of life as documented by mother Madzy and shared by daughter and author Marianne makes this a most fascinating book. This is a must read for every family that experienced the hardships, the many joys, the deep love, the learning and growing within a Canadian society. The book draws from Madzy's diaries, letters, newspapers, and columns, including the two years she wrote in *De Nederlandse Courant* (1962-1964).

Frontiers and Sanctuaries speaks of how their lives were shaped as a family through their decisions and the influence of Mother Madzy and the work and guidance of father Bill. Madzy's insightful voice peeks through her writings and her relationships that remained important to her for all of her life. Her book *Land for Our Sons* written by Madzy in 1954 and released in August of 1957 was well received. Her desire to travel, for learning and to have new experiences never left her. When leaving Terrace B.C., which is between the mountains, she wrote: "Instead of giving me a feeling of security, it began to smother me...when I talked to friends like that, some of them looked with a strange expression at me. They were happy here. But then, we all own an individual soul. None is like the other."



Madzy's seriousness about her writing is shown by the persistence with which she saved it, beginning when she was in the United Sates and continuing through her immigration to Canada, noted her daughter Marianne. Madzy was very active in her church and often wrote about her faith in God.

The story of this gifted artistic family allows us to reflect on those experiences and relive them through Madzy's writings, and say well done good and faithful servant.

Marianne Brandis presently lives in Stratford, Ontario. The book was published by McGill-Queens University Press ISBN 13:978-0-7735-2968-7.

Marianne Brandis

Vacations are a necessity, not a luxury

Lisa M. Petsche

For many of us, summer, that much-anticipated season of warmth and light we're entering, is all too brief. Naturally, we'd like to savor it as much as possible. In order to really do so, though, we need to depart from our usual habits and routines.

Indeed, most families I know plan a summer vacation, which typically involves taking a road trip, renting a cottage or going camping.

The word "vacation" originally referred to upper-class people's practice of "moving to a summer home for part of the year, leaving their usual family home vacant" (Wikipedia).

Today it has a broader meaning: "a time of respite from something" (Webster's dictionary). That something could be a paying job or other responsibilities, daily routines, other people, city noise and smog or the complexities of modern life – especially the demands of technology.

The purpose of respite is to refresh us physically, mentally and spiritually, the change of pace – and often environment – renewing our energy and restoring our perspective. When practiced regularly, respite helps keep life's inevitable stresses manageable, preventing burnout – a common phenomenon manifested by physical health problems or such emotional symptoms as frequent irritation by small annoyances and feeling overwhelmed.

Opinions vary as to what constitutes a great vacation. Our goal might be rest and relaxation at home; getting back to basics and spending time in nature; being pampered in a luxurious setting; engaging in adventure; or spending quality time with loved ones.

Despite the benefits of such respite, "vacation deprivation" – foregoing some or all of the workplace vacation days allotted to us – is becoming an increasingly common phenomenon.

How absurd is this? After all, who wouldn't want to take a break from work?

Surely we're aware of the importance of time away in order to recharge our batteries. Yet it's easy to get so caught up in the busyness of everyday life that we can't conceive of retreating from the rat race.

We may not even realize how long it's been since we've taken a break. Or we may perceive we don't have the time or financial resources to properly plan and implement the "ideal" vacation. (Such perfectionism is a common cause of burnout.)

Some of us, too, mistakenly believe that we are indispensable, particularly in our workplace.

Others among us are reluctant to use allotted days because we believe that co-workers would disapprove of our temporary absence, regarding it as inconsiderate and perhaps even disloyal, or that the benefits of time off would be negated by the backlog of work we'd subsequently have to contend with.

Allowing ourselves to reach the point of running on empty before we take a vacation is another common lapse in judgment. Ideally, respite involves prevention of, not recovery from, burnout. Making it a habit, as well as using our vacation days in blocks of time, rather than taking one or two here and there, allows us to reap maximum benefits.

Even if we take advantage of all our vacation time, we're challenged in today's highly technological culture with unplugging from laptop computers, cell phones and other electronic devices we've become dependent on. Physically getting away from it all is no longer enough – we must literally disconnect. Leaving behind all potential distractions and stressors is the only way to ensure we're able to unwind and have fun. For some of us this requires considerable resolve, but the rewards are worth it.

Arranging regular vacations that are truly meaningful – that is, tailored to our particular needs, whether they are quiet and solitude or adventure and excitement – enables us to better manage workplace demands. Spin-offs include being better able to attend to loved ones' and our own personal needs. We're just generally more positive and energetic people.

It all comes down to balancing priorities.

Here's wishing you a refreshing summer vacation, whatever form of time-out you choose.

Do consider making a donation to a local summer camp foundation that enables underprivileged children or families to also experience the benefits of respite.

Lisa M. Petsche is a clinical social worker and a freelance writer specializing in family life, mental health and spirituality.

Reflections on Stewardship

Rick De Graaf

The gift of hospitality

One day many centuries ago, Abram entertained three strangers. Abram ended up entertaining God! But he is not alone. According to the Scriptures we might be able to do likewise. Consider the parable of the sheep and goats: "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me." (Matt. 25:40) Or even more bluntly in Hebrews 13:2: "Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it."

Hospitality is being kind, generous, and friendly to others – opening your home and receiving strangers as guests. Very early on, God through Moses added this command: "When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the Lord your God." (Leviticus 19: 33, 34). Consider how closely this ties in with the summary of the commandments: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbour as yourself." (Luke 10:27)

Most of us have beautiful well-outfitted, attractive and comfortable homes. I've personally enjoyed staying in many of your homes when I'm on tour. Most of the time we were strangers when we met, but friends when we left. Why? Genuine hospitality!

A hospitable home is a welcome center for a stranger; it is a gift from God. It is a ministry – and it is what God enables us to do. My colleagues at CSS, and prior to that at CRWRC, can attest to that. When enjoying your hospitality, I often find it hard to call it a night or to say good-bye. My thanks to all who read this and have treated me to your hospitality. Your hospitality puts you in good company: consider the Shunamite couple (2 Kings 4), Mary and Martha, and Lydia.

But hospitality isn't what it used to be. Today, hospitality is an industry and to a large extent it has been institutionalized. Shelter is provided by the hotel and motel industry; care of the sick and injured is done in a hospital, and care for the dying in Hospice. Years ago, this was all the work of the Christian church as part of doing ministry. It's time that we reconsider our stewardship of our homes as hospitality centers and to deliberately look for opportunities to be hospitable.

Here is a short story of hospitality that illustrates how even a small thing makes an impact:

Bill was a bit slow, but he was hired to sweep the streets of a small town. Every day throughout the summer he would diligently sweep the streets.

An elderly widow saw him hard at work and took him a glass of lemonade and a fresh slice of cake or pie. Each time Bill came down her street she would take him lemonade and dessert. Each time he would shyly thank her and say little else.

One evening near the end of summer there was a knock on her door. There stood Bill with a sack of peaches in one hand and a sack of roasting ears in the other. He told her that they were for her, to thank her for her expressions of kindness toward him.

The widow was surprised and said, "Bill, this is too much, it was nothing!"

Bill replied, "Maybe it wasn't much ma'am, but it was more than anyone else did." *

This past November, Citizens for Public Justice (CPJ) initiated a new initiative: Welcome the Stranger: Becoming Neighbours. This initiative focuses on refugees and aims to:

- be a source of accurate information and helpful perspective on refugees and other newcomers
- identify public policy areas that are problematic and propose alternatives
- and provide opportunities for Canadians to welcome the stranger and become neighbours.

Find out more about this initiative by visiting their website at www.cpj.ca. Let's do what we can to be hospitable to refugees and help them find a home in Canada.

Touching someone else's life with your hospitality is a mark of a Christian steward. Using your gift of hospitality could have you entertaining angels!

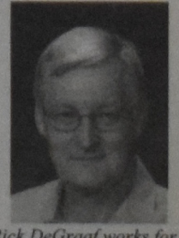
Stewardly tip: Practical ways to minister hospitality*

- Be alert at all times to the opportunities to help others.
- Be really interested in other people.
- Take an interest in your neighbourhood and the others who live there.
- Do something for those who are less fortunate than we are.
- Be motivated by the spirit of God to minister and not by guilt.
- Do not minimize the value of helping someone else.

**(fromwww.brandonweb.com/gbt/sermonpages/2corinthians19.htm)*

Readers: Share your Stewardly Tips so that we all can make better use of the resources God has entrusted to us. Submit your suggestion and your contact information so that we can acknowledge your contribution or ask for more details.

Next issue: Earthkeeping



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Malawi Presbyterian synod proposes letting pastors carry arms

Frank Jomo

Blantyre, Malawi (ENI) – Clerics have not been spared in Malawi's spiraling of armed robberies and the situation is so severe the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) says it will allow some clerics to own at least one firearm for personal protection.

Central Malawi Nkhoma Synod's Church and Society Program director, Allan Chiphiko, told journalists on May 18 so many criminals have terrorized pastors that the synod is proposing to allow clerics to carry firearms for their personal safety.

"It is true the synod reverends will now be allowed to own guns for their safety because our pastors have been victims of various attacks and robberies," said Chiphiko. "There is nothing else we can do. This is just a matter of defence or self-protection. A pastor is also a person like anybody else; he feels pain."

Chiphiko said the proposal would not go against the church's mission of spreading the word of God. He noted that 16 pastors have recently been targeted in armed robberies at the synod's headquarters in Malawi's capital, Lilongwe.

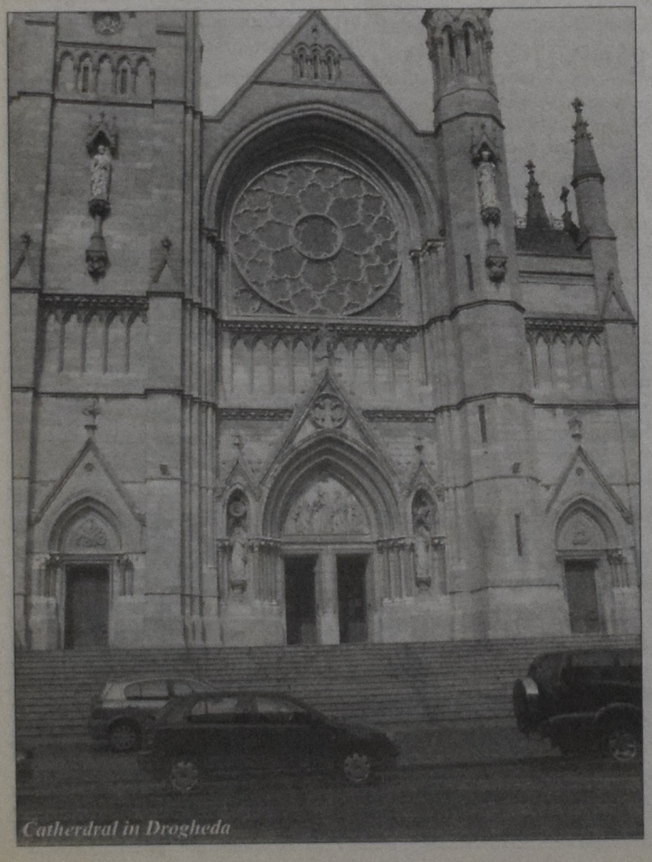
The Presbyterian official told Malawi's Dispatch newspaper that armed men recently besieged the house of the Rev. Siden Chiume in Dedza, a district, which boarders Lilongwe. In the attack, a robber chopped off the pastor's fingers with a knife.

The synod conducted prayers on May 20 and 21 for an end to the criminality. But discussion on the guns' policy has begun with the church's general secretary.

Last year, the issue of whether pastors should be accompanied by bodyguards was debated. One newspaper debate noted divisions among clergy, some saying only God is the true protector of people, while others argued that with the escalating crime there was nothing wrong in pastors having bodyguards.

Some newspaper reports have said that clergy have been targeted by armed robbers because criminals know they are unlikely to own guns. Roman Catholic clergy have also been targeted by armed robbers. Presbyterians and Catholics make up the majority of Malawi's Christian population.

In February, Kenyan clerics from various denominations considered petitioning the government to grant them licences to carry firearms to fend off armed robbers.



Catherdral in Drogheda

German Lutherans say global assembly should boost Protestant links

Frauke Brauns

Bielefeld, Germany (ENI) – Lutheran leaders in Germany say they hope the global assembly of the Lutheran World Federation scheduled to meet in Stuttgart, Germany in 2010 will boost links with other Protestant denominations.

The federation's German National Committee has proposed that governing bodies of other global church groupings should meet in parallel with the Lutheran assembly.

The Lutheran leaders said they hoped for "adequate space for a thematic dialogue with church families that stem from the [Protestant] Reformation". They referred to the Anglican Communion, the World Methodist Council and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC).

In 2005, the Reformed and Lutheran groups corresponded about holding their next assemblies together, but that plan seemed to flounder when the LWF scheduled its next assembly for 2010 in Stuttgart.

Earlier this year, the general secretary of the World Council of Churches, the Rev. Samuel Kobia, proposed that the next assembly of the WCC should be held as a "combined event" with the Lutheran and Reformed gatherings, and other world Christian bodies that wished to join.

Many of the WCC members also belong to Christian world communions such as WARC and the LWF. All three groups are headquartered at the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva, Switzerland, and hold global assemblies every six or seven years.

Udo Hahn, the spokesperson of the LWF German National Committee, told ENI the idea for a dialogue between Reformation churches in Stuttgart could be a "first step" towards Kobia's proposal.

However, the next WCC assembly would probably meet in 2013 and it was unlikely it could be a joint meeting since the LWF's assembly would have taken place only three years previously, he said.

"Nevertheless, the German Lutherans are giving a signal that they want to participate in a joint meeting with the WCC and WARC," noted Hahn. The first step would be to increase coordination between the major Protestant church bodies. That could lead to cooperation with the WCC in the long run, he added.

Anti-graft Nigerian priest escapes after car sprayed with bullets

Obed Minchakpu

Enugu, Nigeria, 16 May (ENI) – The perils of being a firebrand preacher who speaks out against corrupt officials has come again as a reminder to the Rev. Ejike Mbaka who has escaped a second attempt on his life after gunmen last week sprayed his car with bullets.

The 40-year-old Roman Catholic priest was driving to his church after a meeting with his Bishop Anthony Gbuji of the Catholic Diocese of Enugu in southeastern Nigeria on May 9 when gunmen launched an attack on him and raked his car with gunfire. His followers say it was an assassination attempt on the priest.

Enugu State Police Commissioner Charles Dawodu said Mbaka was accompanied by two orphans in his car who also escaped unharmed. Mbaka noticed he was being trailed by unknown persons in a car, and sped off, but "was eventually blocked by the attackers who fired at his car," Dawodu said.

"Luckily, a patrol team sighted the armed robbers ... along the Enugu-Onitsha expressway and opened fire on them. The robbers quickly abandoned the vehicle and fled in their own car. We recovered the jeep which was later handed over to the owner," said Dawodu. The commissioner did not believe the attack was an assassination attempt but was carried out by "common criminals."

Mbaka is a charismatic preacher who heads the Adoration Ministries of the Catholic Church in Enugu, which holds gospel crusades each week in the city, attracting thousands of faithful from across Nigeria.

He has been outspoken against injustice, government corruption, and the persecution of Christians in Africa's most populous country where 50 per cent of the population are estimated to be Muslims and about 40 per cent Christians.

The last attempt to assassinate Mbaka was in 2002 while he was preaching during one of his crusades. In that attack and in the resulting police action, 14 people were killed.

Irish Catholic priests apologize for celebrating Mass with Anglicans

Ray McMenamin

Dublin, (ENI) – Three Irish Roman Catholic priests have apologized for concelebrating Mass with an Anglican cleric to mark the 90th anniversary of Ireland's 1916 Easter Rising, when Irish nationalists proclaimed independence from Britain.

The Mass took place on Easter Sunday, April 16, at the Augustinian Priory in Drogheda in County Louth, north of Dublin. The short-lived Easter Rising 90 years earlier was put down by British troops and many of its ringleaders were executed.

The service also commemorated the thousands of Irish people, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, who fought at the Battle of the Somme in 1916 during the First World War.

The leaders of the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches in Ireland rebuked the clerics for the concelebration, the rite by which several priests celebrate Mass together. Roman Catholic rules forbid such ceremonies with Protestant or Anglican clerics.

Roman Catholic Archbishop Sean Brady said the service created "a real danger of causing widespread confusion, by raising false hopes and creating situations that are open to misunderstandings and manipulation".

The head of the (Anglican) Church of Ire-land, Robin Eames, said: "Such occasions, while well intentioned, might well be misunderstood."

The Anglican priest who concelebrated, Rev. Michael Graham, was reported by the Irish Times newspaper to have described the event as "a wonderful occasion" and he had shared in the ceremony "in all its fullness".

However, in a May 15 statement, the Irish Province of the Augustinian Order, to which the three Catholic priests belong, said it regretted "the pain, confusion and damage caused as a result of the Easter Sunday Eucharistic celebration at its church in Drogheda".

It stated that the priests had written to Archbishop Brady and other Catholic leaders expressing regret.

"Their letter apologizes unreservedly for the ill-considered celebration and gives an absolute commitment as to future conduct in matters liturgical," the statement said.

Reacting to the apology, Brady spoke of the need for patience in inter-church relations. "We are all well aware of the pain caused by the divisions among Christians and of the need to constantly recommit ourselves to pray and work patiently for the healing of those divisions," he said.

Church loan scheme lifts Filipino entrepreneurs lives and faith

Maurice Malanes

La Trinidad, Philippines (ENI) – Entrepreneurs with small enterprises in the northern Philippines say a church-backed financing program has helped improve the overall quality of their lives and also helped to strengthen their Christian faith.

"I thank the Lord Jesus Christ for giving us Eclof (Ecumenical Church Loan Fund) because without it, my family would not be where we are now," said 50-something Estrella Baliang, who buys and sells socks, jackets and other clothes. "With the Eclof backing, our business continues to grow."

Currently operating in 30 developing countries, including the Philippines, Eclof is an ecumenical organization begun in 1946 in Switzerland through the initiative of visionary church leaders supported by Christian bankers. It has a special alliance with the Geneva-based World Council of Churches and Netherlands-based Oikocredit.

Due to good business, Baliang and her husband managed to send their five children to school. The eldest graduated from a course in criminology in April, which Baliang says is testimony to "God's goodness".

Peter Dao-ines, 55, a farmer who cultivates strawberries has a similar opinion of the church-backed financing service.

"Through the loans, we were not only able to pay our land rentals, and improve our business, we were also able to pay our tithes in our church," he says. "So, I also thank the Lord for Eclof." For his strawberry growing business, Dao-ines rents about 2500 square meters of land from the Benguet State University.

"We used to borrow from private moneylenders who would charge us usurious interests. But we are now grateful for having found Eclof," notes Gloria Pagoy, 58, who cultivates flowers, which are in big demand on All Saints Day (1 November), Valentines Day, Christmas, and during the traditional wedding months from April to June. "With Eclof's low interests, we recover our investments and even get modest earnings."

Before she discovered Eclof in 2003, Pagoy had four greenhouses that she was able to build up over a number of years. With the loans from Eclof, Pagoy was able to immediately build another greenhouse.

"Since Eclof is a good finance backer, I always tell members of my group to stay credible and be prompt in repaying our loans," says Pagoy.

Baliang, Dao-ines, and Pagoy are among 1450 borrowers from Eclof Philippines' Benguet branch in the north of the southeast Asian country. Most of them have success stories and experiences of faith to recount. Eclof-Philippines has thousands of other clients in other parts of the country, most of them small entrepreneurs and farmers.

Eclof clients interviewed by ENI concurred that their loans, at 2.5 per cent interest plus rebates, are more affordable and accessible than commercial bank lending and loans from private moneylenders. The minimum loan commercial banks offer is 1 million pesos (US$19 150), which small entrepreneurs and farmers cannot afford. Eclof, on the other hand, lends amounts as small as 5,000 pesos ($96) to as high as 300,000 pesos.

Clients also say they appreciate the capacity-building training provided through Eclof. Pagoy cites courses on how to manage a business and basic cash recording, and another on Christian leadership and stewardship, which Eclof clients completed in April. "This training is not given when you loan from a bank or from a private money lender," she said.

In explaining the "fair-credit-to-promote-human-development" goal of Eclof, its international director Muhungi F. Kanyoro told ENI: "Our clients must succeed in improving their lives through the loans Eclof extends; otherwise, we fail. The measure of our success is not just the repayment rates of loans but the positive impact of the loans on the lives of the clients."

Kanyoro was in the Philippines along with directors and staff from other countries during April. One of their tasks was to assess how Eclof has fared since it was established 50 years ago.

Eclof: www.eclof.org/

Alliance calls churches worldwide to unite against globalization

A major international forum on mission and spirituality has called for a united movement among churches around the world alongside other faiths and civil society to challenge the deadly effects of neoliberal economic globalization.

Sponsored by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and the Council for World Mission (CWM), the forum drew 41 church leaders from Europe, Asia, the Pacific, the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, North America and the Caribbean to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, May 15 to 19.

The event titled "Living out the Accra Confession and its implications for our spirituality and mission" was called to continue the process of mobilizing churches to act against the injustices of globalization that impoverish millions worldwide.

The Accra Confession was a major statement of the 24th General Council of WARC held at Accra, Ghana, in 2004. It declared that working to create a more just economy is essential to the integrity of Christian faith.

"We affirm that Accra was not the end but a signpost along the way and that with us and all those who have declared (in the Accra Confession) 'we commit ourselves to seek a global covenant for justice in the economy and the earth in the household of God,' the covenanting process enters a new stage and we invite all God's people to join us in this journey," the Kuala Lumpur statement says.

"Today we are driven towards a state of madness by the forces of domination, the logic of empire and the neoliberal temptation to worship mammon, not God. This madness extends to the whole creation which is today paying a high price, threatening life in all its forms.

"The Accra Confession warns that there may be no life at all if this madness continues and reminds us of God's call to chose life not death."

The Kuala Lumpur statement acknowledges that many churches have distorted the wonder of creation through their theology and worship. And it calls for churches to reclaim the true meaning of economy which has been "poisoned" by neoliberal economics.

"The neoliberal global economy, an economic system based primarily on individual accumulation of wealth and property, is claiming total and hegemonic control over all of life, demanding an endless flow of sacrifices from the poor and the earth."

The statement says churches must "reclaim the theological idea that the economy of God is in direct contradiction to the current neoliberal economy."

God's economy is participatory, it promotes solidarity, ensures there is no poverty or inequality, emphasizes compassion, recognizes the limits to natural resources and promotes ecological integrity while building up communities that are centred on the sharing of good and ensuring justice for all.

"We invite all God's people to join with us in a 'covenanting for justice' movement to transform ourselves and the world according to God's purposes and promises, inspired by the vision of a new heaven and new earth," the statement says.

"Through mutual encouragement and solidarity we can increase our capacity, our strength and our courage as we engage with the principalities and powers of our time."

WARC is a fellowship of 75 million Reformed Christians in 218 churches in 107 countries. CWM is a worldwide community of 31 Christian churches. The CRC is a member of WARC.

World churches affirm freedom of religion, but warn on conversions

Geneva (ENI) – A joint effort by the Vatican and the World Council of Churches (WCC) to seek a common code for religious conversions has begun by affirming the freedom of religion as a "non-negotiable" human right while stressing that the "obsession of converting others" needs to be cured.

"Freedom of religion is a fundamental, inviolable and non-negotiable right of every human being in every country in the world," states the report of the May 12-16 meeting in Velletri, near Rome, that launched the cooperative study, the WCC announced in Geneva on May 17. The 27 persons present at the meeting, included adherents of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and the Yoruba religion.

The Catholic Church accounts for about 1.2 billion Christians worldwide while the WCC is a grouping of 347 churches in more than 120 countries coming from Anglican, Protestant and Orthodox traditions and it is the largest grouping of denominations.

Those at the meeting declared that the right to freedom of religion entails the "equally non-negotiable responsibility to respect faiths other than our own, and never to denigrate, vilify or misrepresent them for the purpose of affirming superiority of our faith." Moreover, the "right to invite others to an understanding" of one's own faith "should not be exercised by violating other's rights and religious sensibilities".

The report also recommends: "All should heal themselves from the obsession of con-verting others." Acknowledging that "errors have been perpetrated and injustice committed by the adherents of every faith," it suggests that "it is incumbent on every community to conduct honest self-critical examination" of its historical record as well as its doctrines.

As a result of such "self-criticism and repentance," some reforms should take place in order to ensure a healthier approach to the issue of conversion. Some concrete suggestions include: discouraging and rejecting "unethical means," avoiding taking advantage of "vulnerable" people like children and disabled persons, and doing humanitarian work "without any ulterior motives."

The report recognizes that "many differences and disagreements" remained, but that a "convergent understanding of the several aspects of the issue of religious conversion" developed. The participants welcomed the idea of a collectively developed code of conduct on conversion and suggested "that inter-religious dialogues on the issue of conversion should continue at various levels."

Links: Report available at:
www.oikoumene.org/index.php?id=2252&L=0

Religion and culture

Can we be moral without God?

Harry Antonides

Europe has been threatened by Islam several times before, but has managed to withstand it. Why not now? If we want to mount a defense of Western civilization, then we first need to define what Western civilization is. (Wolfgang Bruno)

Bassam and Shirley Madany have spent a lifetime bringing the Gospel to the Arab world via the Back to God Hour radio broadcast. Though now retired, they are still very active in the Gospel ministry while keeping a sharp eye on the Middle Eastern cauldron and on the revolutionary impact of the large-scale immigration of Muslims into Europe. They are an invaluable source of information about these topics, and can be reached at www.levant.info.

Do we need religion?

Today I received from them an essay by Wolfgang Bruno with the arresting title, "Do We Need Religion?" This turned out to be a fascinating read since that question confronts us with the most compelling reality of what it means to be human.

Yet many, especially among the academic and media elite, scoff at even raising this question. Don't you know that all religions are just projections of human imagination? Such fictions were much needed in previous times of ignorance when life was precarious and primitive.

All that, so say the sophisticates, is left behind with the rise of science and technology. They predicted that religion would gradually disappear as we humans would learn to understand and to control our natural environment. Many believed that modernity meant liberation from faith in the supernatural and entrance into a new age of progress, marked by freedom and prosperity.

Marx was in tune with the modern age when he declared in 1848 that religion is the opium of the people. So was *Time* magazine when in its December 25, 1964 issue it announced "that it is the 20th century, the age of technological miracle, that has seen the triumph of the Enlightenment and the apparent banishment of God from the universe – even thanks to Freud, from the human soul."

But things have not quite turned out that way. For the religious impulse, the belief that there is more to reality than what we can see with the naked eye, turned out to be deeply ingrained in human nature. As C.K. Chesterton famously noted, when people no longer believe in God, they do not believe in nothing, they will believe in anything. This defencelessness in the face of alien religious forces has now come home to the Western democracies in the form of militant Islam.

It is in this context that Wolfgang Bruno deserves our attention. He is a European author who currently is writing a book entitled *Reformation Impossible: What's Wrong With Islam and What's Wrong With the West?* In his article mentioned at the outset, Bruno engages Ali Sina, an ex-Muslim Iranian, who maintains a lively Web site (www.faithfreedom.org) where he explains, as someone who knows Islam from the inside, why he has become an outspoken critic of militant Islam. Sina has posted a large number of articles and essays, as well as an introduction and synopsis of his forthcoming book *Understanding Islam and the Muslim Mind*. Bruno's article is also posted there.

Let's follow the discussion of these two authors in Bruno's essay "Do We Need Religion?" As they debate the merits and demerits of religious faith – as a necessity in the fight against the radical branch if Islam.

European heritage from African perspective

What's wrong with the West?

Bruno has read Sina's forthcoming book and agrees with most of it, including the belief that Islam probably cannot be reformed. Both authors pay a lot of attention to what is wrong with the West and the need for reclaiming its morality. But Bruno parts ways with Sina who believes that all religions are fraudulent, which is why he thinks that a way must be found "to salvage morality and family values without the burden of religion."

Bruno is of the opinion that you cannot have morality without religion, which leads him to the position that the most important issue facing the West is not how it should deal with Islam and Muslim immigration, but with what is wrong with itself. Hence his statement quoted at the start of this article that to mount a defence of Western civilization it must first define its own identity. He is of the conviction, though he is not himself a Christian, that such reclamation of its own identity will require the strengthening of the traditional Judeo-Christian religion of the West.

He believes that the West is now mired in an internal cultural battle, that is, an ideological civil war over the purpose of the West which, combined with Muslim immigration, might well trigger civil wars in several Western nations. Bruno then singles out the ideology of egalitarianism, including multiculturalism, as one of the contenders in this conflict. He writes, "as long as large parts of our elites adhere to the notion that all cultures are equal, it will be impossible to mount any defense of the West. Which means that Multiculturalism and Egalitarianism need to be discredited if Europe is to have any chance of surviving."

Bruno says that he has been puzzled by the seemingly cosy relationship between Muslims and European socialists who tend to be anti-religious. He has come to see this as a result of their shared antipathy towards Christianity and towards the notion of individual rights. He thinks that it makes sense not to differentiate between religious and non-religious ideologies, but to consider all of them as being religious, with this distinction that some are religions with God and some without God. Therefore, he thinks that Marxism should be considered a religion with its own prophet, sacred text, and the promise of heaven. Marx was not a scientist but the founder of a faith.

Bruno discusses the tendency of many intellectuals in the West to argue that Islam is misunderstood as they once did with respect to Communism. Their tolerance for both these enemies of the free West contrasts sharply with their intolerance towards the Christian faith.

Secularism: the enemy within

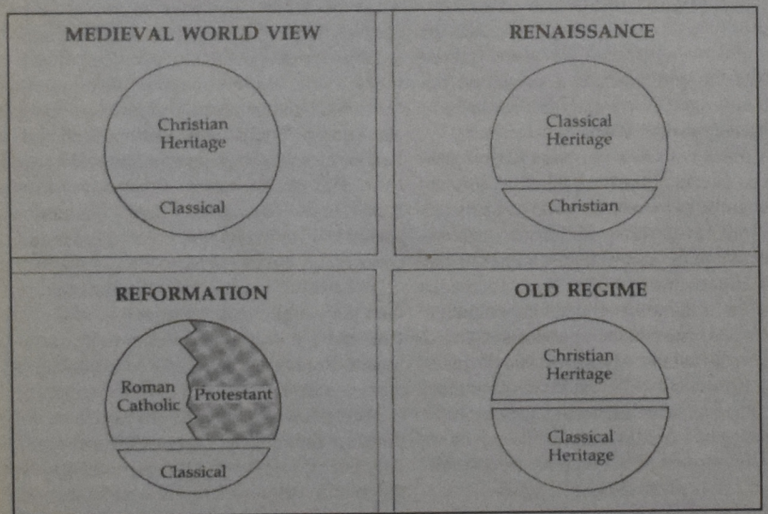
After explaining his disagreement with some key elements of Ali Sina's position on Christianity, the concept of the person, and personal responsibility, Bruno quotes the Chinese American writer Ohmyrus, who is convinced that Christianity has been an "invaluable part of what made the West into what it is." In an essay "Bring Back that Old Time Religion," Ohmyrus writes that secularism leads to a short term and hedonistic attitude that destroys faith in the future. Ohmyrus sums up his position by saying that:

in the current war against terrorism, secularism is a hindrance. It encourages political correctness, low birth rates, self-doubts and apathy. The West, especially Europe is in a deep spiritual crisis. Secularism could be a fatal weakness in its body politic against a resurgent Islam as polytheism probably was in 7th century Mecca. Modern Europeans are the lucky heirs of Christian civilization which has contributed so much to human progress.

Bruno agrees, though he sees the flaws within Christianity, including the potential for naïve pacifism, and the failure on the part of many Christian leaders to recognize aggressive Islam for the enemy it is. But he also appreciates that these flaws are balanced out by the institution of the nation state which has made modern democracy possible.

In contrast, individual choice in Islam does not exist, which explains why democracy in Islamic countries is so hard to establish. Muslims hate freedom, writes Bruno, because it permits people to think and decide for themselves, rather than as a cell of a larger organism, the Ummah.

Islam is advancing in Europe, because Europe is suffering from the opposite disease, namely the belief that there is no truth and that all cultures are equal. This kind of multiculturalism easily mutates into nihilism



How European Civilization Changed between 1200 and 1800

These four diagrams offer a schematic way of thinking about how the different elements of European civilization split apart and rearranged themselves between 1200 and 1800.

Media

The Da Vinci Code and mass gullibility in the TV Age

Peter C Glover

Everyone who has acquainted themselves with the facts knows that the central theses behind the *The Da Vinci Code* (DVC) are bunkem. The real problem driving the current furore is that author Dan Brown purports that the DVC is based on "fact" and that it is therefore "more than just a novel". The opening page in Brown's book is headed with the single word: Fact. Beneath it is the statement: "All descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents and secret rituals in this novel *are accurate*" (italics mine). And there, in a nutshell, is the intellectual rub.

Anyone who has taken the trouble to go beyond the hype and pursue the facts via solid investigative works such as *The Da Vinci Hoax* and *Decoding the Da Vinci Code* will already have been alerted and perhaps be in awe of the sheer level of mass gullibility on the matter. I vividly recall the host on a program on British television "The Real Da Vinci Code" exclaim, "How on earth can people believe this stuff?" How indeed – and therein lies the real issue behind the current furore: public gullibility in a TV-dominated, image-orientated, media age.

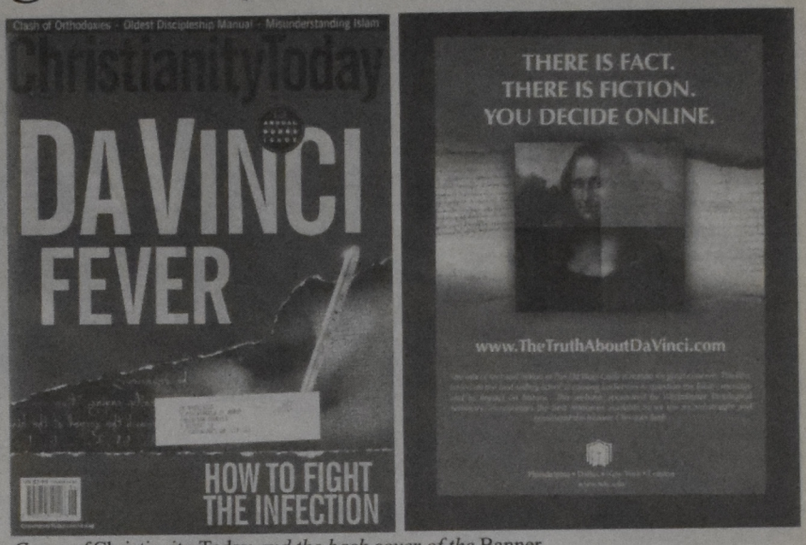
While occasional documentaries have debunked Brown's central assertions, the plain fact is that the mainstream media generally has so overplayed the element of public interest "controversy" that it has lent an averagely written thriller a "historic myth-busting" image and credibility which it simply does not deserve. One TV ad in the UK, reinforced the subliminal message that the book seriously "threatens two thousand years of the Christian Church." Countless similar media advertising and other soundbite images augment the pervasive view that this novel unearths a powerful truth. Whether people go to see the film or not, the media message is that this is no ordinary movie experience. No wonder Sony marketing is so reluctant to bow to pressure to add a "work of fiction" disclaimer. They are quite happy to allow the media hype to drive what has become a cultural phenomenon and cash cow.

We might therefore do well to remind ourselves of Neil Postman's warning, in his superb *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, over the "culture-death" that threatens when we swallow the fragmented image of truth that TV and film often present. Postman warns that in the modern world, while everyone believes they are entitled to an opinion, "these opinions are of quite a different order from eighteenth-century or nineteenth-century opinions. It is probably more accurate to call them emotions rather than opinion, which could account for the fact that they change from week to week, as the pollsters tell us…television is altering the meaning of 'being informed' by creating a species of information that might properly be called disinformation."

Thus, Postman asserts, the mass media is more geared to creating a public perception of truth (truth in the image or ideology of the author, editor or producer) than it is to presenting truth per se. He goes on to make a powerfully resonant point that "all public understanding of these subjects is shaped by the biases of television." And, we might add, film.

In stark contrast to Postman's warning comes the recent poll Trust in the Media conducted by Globescan. It reveals that an average of 61 per cent of people across the ten nations surveyed trust their national mass media to tell them the truth. Eight of the countries surveyed trust their media more than their government. The two exceptions bucking the trend were the USA and UK where polls revealed a slightly higher trust for government than for the media. Though trust of the mainstream media in the US still stands at over 50 per cent.

As if to confirm the findings in the Globescan poll a second new poll, conducted in the UK by Open Research Business for the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales, reveals that in fact the influence of *The Da Vinci Code* – no doubt in conjunction with recent media marketing – has radically affected public opinion on the central teachings of the church. According to the poll, two-thirds of Britons who read Brown's book believe that Jesus fathered a child with Mary Magdalene, a claim rejected as baseless by historians and Bible scholars. Sixty per cent said that after reading the book they believed that Jesus fathered a bloodline that survives today. And just under one third believe that the Catholic Church is covering up the truth about Jesus, a figure that rises to 36 per cent among those who have read Brown's book. The poll has shaken church leaders and prompted the Catholic Church to call for a global boycott of the film.



Cover of Christianity Today *and the back cover of the* Banner

Austin Ivereigh, the director for public affairs for Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, head of the Catholic Church in England and Wales, accused Brown and the film-makers of "dishonest marketing." The Catholic sponsored poll findings appear to bear out Ivereigh's claim that the film's distributors "have encouraged people to take it seriously while hiding behind the claim that it is fiction."

Da Vinci Code star Tom Hanks has weighed in by telling the British press he believes it is "just a good story," and adds that it is full of "hooey" and "nonsense". Even so, Dan Brown continues to propagate his claim to pedal the essential truth in the book on US and world TV and radio circuits.

As usual with new popular cultural phenomena, works debunking the myth driving it are unable to garner the same mass media attention. In the face of Sony's intransigence in adding a simple disclaimer to the film therefore and the effect the mass media marketing is demonstrably having on public opinion, its critics have a good case. And if we continue to fail to recognize that the mass media, particularly TV and radio, have their own inherent biases, then we shall also fail to see that public opinion may well owe more to the art of propaganda than to any genuine concern for truth in the public square.

Jacques Ellul, in his famous book *Propaganda: the formation of men's attitudes*, said, "Propaganda is a manipulation of psychological symbols having goals of which the listener is not conscious." Indeed, it was the unconscious understanding among many in the crowd before Pilate that so aided Pharisaical propaganda aimed at persuading public opinion to crucify Christ crucified on Good Friday. F.C. Bartlett commented that, "the goal of propaganda is not to increase political understanding of events, but to obtain results through action." The Pharisees were thus wholly successful propagandists. And Ellul, if he was around today, seeing the affect Brown's novel has had on the modern mind and culture might well have the DVC in mind when he wrote, "The propagandist uses a keyboard and composes a symphony." The DVC symphony is playing loud and clear wherever we turn in the media so it seems.

Novelist and scientist Michael Crichton has said, "The greatest challenge facing mankind is the challenge of distinguishing reality from fantasy, truth from propaganda. Perceiving the truth has always been a challenge to mankind, but in the information age (or as I think of it, the disinformation age) it takes on a special urgency and importance." Crichton was making the point that the media-fed public opinion concerning the known "facts" about climate change had an almost religious-type faith element to it. The almost inevitable corollary of a lack of knowledge of hard facts – a situation specifically aided by a scaremongering and controversy-loving mass media.

If Crichton is right, and I believe he is, then the weight given to opinion, both private and public, on any issue ought to be linked directly to the ability to articulate a reasoned case for it. Anything else merely allows either a James Hansen (whose assertions set the climate change ball rolling in 1988) or a Dan Brown – or even a self-serving media – to wield an influence on public opinion far beyond that warranted by the actual facts.

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Can we be moral ...continued from p. 10

where there is no sense of right and wrong. Bruno writes that the individual is then so autonomous "that the country and the civilization largely is left defenseless, because nobody identifies with it any longer, and because short term gratification of individual desires is the only thing left."

In conclusion, Bruno predicts that if the current Islamic advances continue, anything that can be remotely described as European culture will die. Then he writes: "The alternative is a revival of our own religious heritage. I agree with Ohmyrus: Bring back that old time religion."

This brief summary does not do full justice to Bruno's essay. Nor is it a substitute for reading the entire piece (available at www.faithfreedom.org). Some Christians may be turned off by Bruno's pragmatic arguments. But he deserves a lot of credit for spelling out exactly why militant Islam is a serious threat to the as yet free nations of the West. He is not blind to the immorality and decadence of the West, reminding us that this is a two-front war against the enemy within our own house as well as against the outside enemy – radical Islam.

It is refreshing to be reminded by someone who does not share our faith that the very future of a free and democratic Europe is vitally dependent on the recovery of its Christian roots. Such a courageous defence of Christianity deserves an enthusiastic reception from the Christian community.

Harry Antonides hantonides@sympatico.ca

Family

My Opa – Reijer Hulstein

Ray [Reijer] Hulstein

Some time ago, during our weekly Sunday evening telephone calls, my son, Rob, interrupted the conversation with, "Just a minute, Dad, someone wants to say 'hello'" and I heard a little voice say, "Hi, Opa, it's me".

Those words from my 9-year-old granddaughter not only warmed my heart, but at that moment something else happened. I had a "flashback." Did I hear my own voice? Did I hear myself saying those words to my own grandfather more than 70 years ago?

In my life I have had many of those moments where my thoughts have led me to Opa Hulstein. My grandfather, Reijer Hulstein, was a special man. Although he died November 15th,1940 when I was only 11 years old, this man talked to me, guided me, admonished me, warned me and encouraged me. Often I've asked myself, "What would Opa say if he knew what I'm thinking?"; or "What would he say if he knew what I was up to?"

Such has been the influence of my grandfather for me in the very early years of my life.

I know very little about his youth, his four sisters and one brother, except one very important thing: he was born into a very devout Christian family that worshiped at the Hervormde (Reformed) Church in Eerbeek. His father's occupation was paper maker, and he worked at the Schut's Paper Company, which is still in existence today. My grandfather may have worked there as a young man as well.

But in 1910 Opa Hulstein opened his own furniture store in Apeldoorn. Of the four sons born to my grandparents, the three oldest all worked in the store as upholsterers, and all three, including my dad, eventually started their own furniture stores in Apeldoorn.

My earliest memory of visiting my grandparents was when I was about three years old. It was a Sunday and we were invited for dinner. I remember very clearly what we were served that day: meat, potatoes and green cut beans. From then on whenever we had green cut beans at home they never tasted like Oma's beans. Hers were the best – because she put sugar on them.

My grandparents lived in a very old two-story home. Built of gray bricks, it had shutters and window frames that were painted a very dark color, which made it look even older. It had several rooms, some packed with all kinds of furniture, possibly leftovers from Opa's furniture store, which was now being run by three of his sons. There were desks, tables, and beautiful armchairs. One piece of furniture, a reading desk, had a very large and old 'Staten Bible' on it. Its cover was of woven damask and the hinges and lock were of highly polished copper. This room was just used as a storage room and seldom entered. I loved to open the door, peek inside, and inhale the musty air. It smelled of mothballs to preserve the woolen materials of the chairs and small carpets that were also stored there.

I loved Oma's living room. It always felt so cozy. It had all kinds of old and mismatched furniture. An old wooden table stood at the window so you could sit there and look over the beautiful garden, tended by both Opa and Oma, and beyond into the street. I spent many, many special moments at that living room table.

Since my grandparents lived between my school and our home, once or twice a week I would drop in to see Oma, and to be treated to 'Oma's Special' – one Dutch Rusk (beschuit) with a little milk poured over it (butter was too expensive) and then sprinkled with a little sugar. While I was munching this treat, Oma would ask me all kinds of questions: "How was school?"; and "How are things at home?" She always ended the questioning with, "Are you behaving as you should?"

Sometimes she would reach out and straighten the collar of my shirt, tell me to button up my sleeve, or simply take her finger and put my hair back into place, "because it ought to be that way". Of course, it never occurred to me then that I would marry a woman with the same inclination! But I always loved Oma Hulstein dearly.

Many, many years later, on our regular visits to Holland, I would meet my cousins and reminisce about the old days. I was surprised to learn that most of them had quite different experiences and impressions of Oma Hulstein than I. They thought that she was always very stern, unsmiling, and overly eager to correct them, whether in their language or their behavior. And she was always ready to tell them to "Button up your shirt,"or "Walk straight," or "Look at your shoes – go and clean them." They all were, as youngsters, a little afraid of Oma Hulstein, and so they were somewhat surprised to hear about my experiences with her in my younger days and my love for her. I do, however, understand their reservations, as their description of Oma is not unjustified.

There may be some bias in my thoughts about Oma, as there was a special bond between us. I was not made aware of this special bond until years later. A few days after my birth, April 16th, 1929, my mother became seriously ill. Most children were born at home, as I was, and when mother became ill, she was taken to the hospital and remained there for about three months. So I was then taken in by Oma Hulstein. She looked after me, fed me, washed me, changed my diapers and loved me until my mother returned home. Of course, I was not aware of all of this in those days, but I do think that this resulted in a special bond between Oma Hulstein and me.

But to be fair to those who were a little scared of Oma Hulstein, I must relate the following story told to me by our own father. When he was a young man, my father, having just met a beautiful 20-year-old young lady, Geesje Ijzerman, wanted to introduce her to his mother. Apparently he had not chosen a good day. Oma had had a bad day – nothing went right and everything went wrong. Then her son, Henk, came walking in through the door, eager to show off his new girl friend and introduce her to his mother. Seeing her son with his girl, she blurted, "Just when you think everything bad has already happened, this comes walking in the door!"

This was how my mother was introduced to her future mother-in-law. But I must say that I never heard my mother say anything but positive things about Oma Hulstein, and the two always got along.

Telling you about Oma first will give a better picture and a better understanding of Opa Hulstein. Opa and Oma worshiped in the Netherlands Hervormde (Reformed) Church, where Opa was an elder. In the Reformed Church, if someone was chosen as an elder, he remained an elder for life. (That is, unless serious objections were brought forward and confirmed.) Besides being an elder, Opa Hulstein was also a lay preacher and was licensed to preach and lead worship services. He did not preach in large churches but chose to preach in the highways and the byways. Twice a month you could find him preaching in a little chapel called Licht en Leven (Light and Life). This Chapel was in the poorest area of Apeldoorn, known as The Red Village, so named because all the homes had the same roofing – bright red tiles. In this area lived the poorest people, the unemployed and the destitute, and it was here that Opa Hulstein preached twice a month, it was here that he comforted the grieving, visited the lonely, and gave hope to the downtrodden. And it was here that he also showed his wisdom and love for many youngsters who had a falling out with their parents and used his God-given talent to sit down and listen to the concerns of parents. And it was here, not in a large, monumental church, that he not only served spiritual food but also, when there was need, real food to those that were hungry.

One day when my Dad dropped in on his mother's home, he found her quite upset. She was searching through her cupboards and the pantry looking for things that had somehow mysteriously disappeared. She said, "I can only find a few potatoes, and there is only quart of milk here when there were two quarts yesterday. All my white bread is gone and I am left with only two brown loaves! And there are only six eggs left of the dozen I bought last week!"

Oma stood there for a minute thinking hard, and then said, "Oh, wait a minute, it's Tuesday today, isn't it? That man of mine has gone to visit his sheep and raided my pantry again!"

Oma shouldn't have been surprised, since it was certainly not the first time she missed groceries which Opa had taken for the needy.

But Opa's rebuff to Oma's complains was very simple: "These people were hungry, and the Lord has blessed us with so much. When we share with those in need, the Lord will give us more tomorrow."

Although Oma would grumble about things taken from her domain, deep in her heart she supported Opa in his love and concern for others.

As youngsters, of course, we did not always behave, as some of our neighbors would have told you. Some days, we would roam through the neighborhood with a bunch of friends and simply make a nuisance of ourselves. Some of our minor offences were climbing over the neighbor's fence and helping ourselves to apples, ringing doorbells and running away; and letting air out of bicycle tires. One day we went to the local butcher and bought several soup bones for 10 cents. We tied them to a long rope and walked around the block a few times and soon had a host of dogs following us. Then we went to the home of the Daniels sisters, tied the rope to their front door, and rang the bell. We could hear the sisters screaming as

European civilization split apart and rearranged themselves between 1200 and 1800. have any chance of surviving. multiculturalism easily mutates into illiberal

Family

the dogs dashed through the open door into their hallway.

When someone complained about our pranks, I considered myself fortunate if the complaint was lodged with my Dad. It would result in a good old fashioned spanking. But I would be in real big trouble if the complaint was brought to Opa Hulstein. I would rather face the local Police. Opa had such a way of confronting you with your misdeeds, such a " pastoral" way of bringing the Lord into it and then making you go to those you had offended to offer your sincere (?) apologies.

Opa's love and concern for all people, including the poor and needy, saved me one day from being roughed up by several bullies. Dad had asked me to run an errand for him to one of his customers. This errand would lead me right through the area of Red Village. Pedaling my bike, I was accosted by three rough looking characters, dragged off my bike, and pushed into the berm of the road. One of them was trying to take my jacket off while the other two were ready to take off with my bike. Just then an older person came by, saw what was happening, and started yelling, "Leave that boy alone! He is the grandson of Mr. Hulstein, the Preacher!"

Immediately I was helped up, the bike was handed back to me, and was even offered an apology, albeit ever so reluctantly. I was saved by the love and care of Opa Hulstein, the "preacher," for the people of the Red Village.

Opa Hulstein had one well-known ritual, and that was regularly visiting his sons at a set time. His visit to us was usually on Wednesday mornings between 10:00 and 10.30. He always biked and today I am still able to describe this bike in detail. It must have been about the oldest contraption in town. It had the weirdest handle bars and a very odd shaped saddle. It was very large – maybe so that it would fit his rather large behind.

Today I still can't understand nor describe the light on this bike. The lens had hinges and a button, and when you pushed a button, it opened like a door. Inside was a holder which held some sort of a candle. Open the glass door, light the candle, close the door and you are all set to peddle away at night.

Protruding from the left side of the rear wheel was a steel bar. Opa was not able to mount his bike in the usual way, so he would stand behind his bike and, with both hands on the handle bars, he would put his left foot on the steel bar, set himself in motion with his right leg and than heave himself over the back wheel and rear bike rack into the saddle. I used to love watching him take off, his oversized black coat flapping in the wind.

When biking, Opa always wore a felt cap. He had beautiful, curly gray hair that curled around the back of his cap as if to hold it in place and keep it from blowing off.

Wednesdays was half a day of school for us and sometimes if we hurried home, Opa would still be there and we would be able to talk to him. But he usually did all the talking by asking us all kind of questions – about ourselves, about school, our friends, and when he was leaving, he would simply put a hand on our shoulders, gave a little squeeze and say, "Dag, mijn jonge," which means, "Goodbye, my boy."

And then, off course, I would walk him to the street just to see him take off on his bike.

On November 15, 1940, Opa Hulstein made his regular weekly visit to our home. Together with my parents and a neighbor who had dropped in, Opa was sitting around the kitchen table having coffee and conversation. Around 11 o'clock that morning, Opa quietly said, "I'm not feeling too well at the moment. Could I just lie down on the couch in the living room?"

As he was escorted to the living room it became very obvious that he was not well at all. Dad phoned our doctor who, after observing Opa's condition, informed my parents that it would be wise to call the rest of the family together as Opa had had a very severe stroke and the end could very well be near.

When I came home about lunchtime I saw several bicycles parked against the wall of our home, and when I passed the living room and looked through the window, I saw my parents, my Oma, uncles and aunts, all standing around the living room couch. As I entered the kitchen, Dad came to meet me and told me that Opa was very seriously ill, unlikely to live much longer and if I wished to see him yet, to join them in the living room. Our living room was crowded with uncles and aunts, all standing in front of Opa lying on the sofa, while Oma sat on a chair beside him. The attending doctor looked at the relatives and quietly shook his head. To me it looked like Opa was asleep and I don't think that I realized that Opa's life here on earth was nearly ended.

I have forgotten how long I stood there watching him, when some time later his eyelids started to flutter and he opened his eyes. With obvious effort, he slightly lifted his arm and with his fore finger he pointed upwards. For a moment I thought he looked straight at me and I saw a smile appear on his face. Then his arm dropped down, and at that moment, Opa Reijer Hulstein left us behind while he went to be with his Lord and Savior whom he had served so faithfully.

In Holland in those early years, and well into the 1940's, women usually gave birth to their children at home. And the caskets containing the body of the departed were also placed in their homes until the day of the burial. The casket was placed in the front room, often called the "pronk kamer," loosely translated the "show room". Such a room was very seldom used as a living room, but often decorated with fine furniture, carpets, special ornaments and often displayed valuable knick knacks and paintings. There the

Geesje Hulstein and Ray (Reijer) Hulstein

casket with Opa Hulstein's body was also displayed. It was also customary that all the blinds and shutters of the home were shut until after the casket and body were removed for burial. And so it was at Korteweg 33 in Apeldoorn, Holland.

On the day of the funeral, all the relatives, as well as grandchildren up to a certain age, came to Oma's home. The house was dark, everybody wore black, no one smiled, everyone looked very somber, and everybody whispered. I felt scared and extremely uncomfortable. And then came the time for those who wished to do so to have a last look at Opa Hulstein. Almost everyone went to that front room and filed passed the casket for a final "Goodbye."

I stayed in the kitchen and Oma asked me if I wanted to say goodbye to Opa. She must have seen my hesitation and said, "If you want to, I will come with you." She took me by the hand, we went to the front room and I had my final look at my Opa. Then she bent over the casket, kissed Opa, and I heard her say, "Dag, mijn lieve jonge," which means, "Bye, my dear boy".

Taking the body from the home to the burial ground was a very somber, almost creepy affair. The casket was removed from the house by gentlemen dressed completely in black and wearing tall black hats. It was loaded into a black hearse drawn by two horses which were also draped with black cloth. The family followed in horse drawn carriages. The head of the funeral parlor would walk in front of the horse pulling the hearse. He would also be completely dressed in black and would wear a hat similar to that worn by Napoleon. He would then lead this procession at a very slow pace all the way to the gravesite.

I remember looking out of the carriage and seeing people on the sidewalk who would stop, remove their hats or caps and reverently bow their heads until the somber procession had passed. Fortunately, the distance from home to the cemetery was not too far. At the burial site there was already a large crowd and during the service I recognized dignitaries such as the mayor, several well known pastors and the consistory members of Opa's church. But what really struck me, confirmed by my dad later that day, that there were many people there from the Red Village, where Opa was known as "the Preacher". They also came to pay their respects to a man that had shown God's love and his Word to them.

The family members formed a semi circle around the grave site as the service began. There were three ministers attending this service. One from Opa's own congregation, one from Classis and the third minister, I believe, was on behalf of the Synod of the Reformed Church. Each preached a short sermon, but for me, an 11 and a half year old who had enough trouble just sitting still and listening in church, this was a bit too long. Right behind the grave site was a black wrought iron fence. Through this fence was a very busy street and I started to count the cars going by while one sermon after another was preached. Although I didn't pay very much attention to the sermons, I do remember that it was said that Opa's favorite passages of the Bible were those that spoke of being saved by grace and not by good works.

A number of years ago, on a visit to Holland, Mies and I went to the old cemetery. It had been closed for many years as a burial ground and a new and larger cemetery was opened at the outskirts of our town. As we went through the gate, we noticed how old and unkempt it had become. The old office was closed and we had no idea as to where to find the grave of Opa and Oma, so we wandered around looking at the names on the, by now, very old stones. Many of the headstones were leaning over and dirty, and the names were often hard to read. We began to wonder if we would ever find the site we were looking for. Then I had a flash back and remembered the wrought iron fence with a street on the other side, with lots of traffic. Finding the fence, and walking along it, we came to a site that looked brand new: white chains around the site, a headstone in shiny black marble and an inscription in clear gold letters. Among all the dilapidated and unkempt plots was this clean and shiny plot.

It was an emotional moment – to stand there and think back about all the years that have gone by. Standing back and looking at the foot of the gravesite I noticed an inscription: two simple words "God regeerd," [God Reigns].

Thank you, Lord, for Christian grandparents. Thank you, Lord, for this grandfather, Reijer Hulstein, a man of your choosing, a man of love, guidance and compassion.

Richmond, Feb. 2006

Ecclesiastes

Justice delayed

When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, the hearts of the people are filled with schemes to do wrong. Although a wicked man commits a hundred crimes and still lives a long time, I know that it will go better with God-fearing men, who are reverent before God. Yet because the wicked do not fear God, it will not go well with them, and their days will not lengthen like a shadow.

Ecclesiastes 8:11-13 NIV

A. A. van Ruler

The longer the Preacher reflects on the facts of human life, the more complicated and confused the knot becomes. He began with the thought that often things go better for the wicked than for the righteous. A wicked man may commit a hundred sins and yet lead a long life.

When we really reflect on that, it seems perplexing. This is apparently the way the world turns. There is an astonishing amount of injustice, cruelty and violence in the world, both on the personal and on the political level. Yet, injustice is often crowned with success, even with fame. On the other hand, there are also those who seek to be honest and just, but their efforts only seem to make it harder for them to survive.

Life shouldn't be like this. One's fate in life should rhyme with one's deeds. On the one hand, there is the physical fact of fate: reality as it actually unfolds. On the other hand, there is the moral act: human beings acting in freedom. If the world were entirely as it should be, then act and fact, virtue and reward, the moral and the physical would correspond. After all, aren't our free actions also part of reality? The moral is interwoven with the physical. They are both part of one reality. They may display very different dimensions, but together they make up one single reality. Therefore, they should harmonize.

But they don't. Since it is all one reality, it is hard to see why. In any case, it raises the question whether God was right when he said that the world he had created is "very good."

Leuvehaven, The destroyed city by Ossip Zadkine. This statue that goes by different nicknames (City without a heart is the most well known one) was made by Zadkine who was inspired when he visited Rotterdam shortly after WWII. May 14th 1940, the city had been bombed heavily and due to the enormous fires after it, "lost its heart". A huge area had to be re-designed and rebuilt.

There is also another question involved. Besides this unfolding reality and the human actions that are woven into it; there are also the acts of God. God judges. He has his own take on things. God is Spirit, which means first of all that he is the Judge. He judges sin. He condemns it and he pronounces his sentence upon it. We are confronted by the imposing idea of judgment, of condemnation, of God's wrath.

We must not, as we moderns are prone to do, pull up our noses at these ideas. We tend to assume that images of retribution belong to the more primitive level of the Old Testament. That strikes me as a terrible misconception. The idea that the plowshare of God's judgment cuts through the totality of our temporal reality seems to me to be one of the highest and most valuable ideas of the Old Testament, for it implies that it is about justice and that this justice will be realized in God's creation. If we neglect the idea of divine judgment, we give up on the meaningfulness and the ultimate goodness of the world. They are part of the greatness of our humanity.

But this is exactly why it's so outrageous that the judgment on sin is not quickly carried out. We see so little of the fact that God judges and that justice is realized on earth, that there really is such a thing as divine wrath and retribution. It is this that creates so much confusion and darkness.

God seems to leave the pots and pans simmer on the fire on their own. It looks as if he isn't doing anything. The most awful injustices are perpetrated and not so much as a cock's crow is raised. Is the Lord God paying attention? Is there really a God who brings justice to this earth?

This is a double evil. The first evil is that act and fate do not harmonize. And then there is the much worse evil that God's judgment seems to have been silenced. We begin to ask not just whether reality is good but also whether God is good – or even whether he is there.

It gets even worse. These two evils give rise to a third. Because God's sentence on human wickedness is not quickly carried out, "the hearts of the people are filled with schemes to do wrong." People see reality as it is, and then they conclude that on close examination all that prattle about God's judgment is nothing but fairytales. The human conscience is a remarkable thing, but it is probably based on a misunderstanding. There's nothing to prevent us from doing as we please. If we commit wrongs, is there anyone who will catch us?

It is strange, but once the sluice gates are opened, the hearts of people are filled with schemes to do wrong. The text literally says that our hearts are *filled* with schemes to do wrong. There isn't any room for anything else. Our whole hearts desire to do evil.

This gives endless food for thought. There seems to be an impulse or an inclination in human beings to do wrong. That isn't a matter of course. We were not created this way. Yet, this is how we come into this world. Then where does this desire toward evil come from?

To this question there is only one possible answer: puzzling as it may sound, evil and the desire to do evil arise from the deepest depths of the human will. This passion for evil is a matter of willing. It is our will that fills our entire humanity with evil desires.

But this is not the point the text wants to make. It is talking about the relationship between the apparent absence of God's judgment in the world and the increase of evil desires in humanity. The two are undoubtedly connected.

The LORD God would be able to put a stop to it, too, if he so desired. If only he would display a bit more of his righteous judgment in reality, people would fear to do wrong. But God doesn't do this. So obviously he must not want to do so. He has deeper ways of dealing with humanity. Even wickedness must be allowed to take on flesh.

We may lament this. And the Preacher, too, complains bitterly. But in this respect the book of Ecclesiastes is mere child's play compared to the gospel of Jesus Christ. There, the deep ways that the Lord God walks with the children of men are traced to their most bitter depths. There, evil is given the opportunity to do its worst – to the outermost darkness. So the good news is actually much darker than the book of Ecclesiastes.

Launchings

Sending 'weather balloons' up – way up

Peter N. Spotts | *Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor*

James Yoe didn't want to spoil his Easter weekend, so he tuned out the news. After all, rocket launches can fail. And to save money, the six tiny, revolutionary weather satellites he helped champion all sat atop one rocket as they awaited their Good Friday liftoff.

"I was nervous having all our eggs in one basket," he recalls. But angst has become elation. The satellites are up and apparently healthy, heralding what several researchers say will be a new era in weather forecasting and climate monitoring.

The satellites, collectively called the Constellation Observing System for Meteorology, Ionosphere, and Climate (COSMIC), use signals from global navigation satellites to measure key traits in the atmosphere with unprecedented coverage and accuracy.

Such measurements now come largely from sensor-carrying balloons lofted worldwide. Balloons gather some 1,500 atmospheric profiles a day, measuring how wind, temperature, pressure, water vapor, and other traits change with altitude. These measurements become the snapshot of the atmosphere that sophisticated computer programs use to churn out weather forecasts several times a day.

Balloons have their limits, however. Most are launched from land, and most land-launched balloons rise over the northern hemisphere. They are costly; the sensor packages often are lost when the balloons come down.

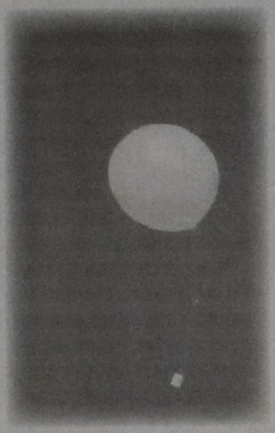
COSMIC, by contrast, is designed to take 2,500 soundings a day and with truly global coverage.

While some of the satellites' measurements overlap those taken with weather balloons and larger weather satellites, these new kids on the orbital block also cover undersampled regions of the atmosphere. And their measurements are based on basic properties of the exquisitely precise timing signals that navigation satellites produce.

This means COSMIC's measurements hold the promise of being more accurate and more stable and consistent over time. This stability is of special interest to climate scientists, who have had to struggle with a current generation of satellite sensors that can drift out of adjustment as they age or yield slightly different readings when engineers update sensor designs.

"We're not just adding redundant information," says Dr. Yoe, deputy director of the federal government's Joint Center for Satellite Data Assimilation in Camp Springs, Md. "This marks one of the first times we have a completely new kind of instrument."

The principle behind the idea has a long, honorable pedigree. For centuries, scientists have been able to calculate how light waves bend as they pass from air into water or glass – materials with different densities. Radio signals represent lower-energy manifestations of light. As radio waves pass through the atmosphere, they, too, bend and their frequency changes slightly. As a satellite passes behind a planet while locked onto a distant radio source, scientists can use the shifting frequencies to estimate how sharply the signal "bends" as it passes through different layers of the atmosphere. From those estimates, researchers can calculate how temperature, pressure, moisture, and other traits change with height.



Launching of weather balloon

Scientists first used the approach, known as radio occultation, to study Mars's atmosphere in 1965 with the Mariner 4 spacecraft, notes Thomas Yunck, who helped pioneer the technique for terrestrial work at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, Calif. Radio occultation experiments have been a staple of unmanned missions to other planets ever since.

But Earth has been slow on the uptake.

Part of the reason is technological. Only with the advent of the Global Positioning Satellite system have enough transmitters been in the right place to make the approach feasible for home-planet use.

Also, the technique has been a tough sell to the weather and climate communities, Mr. Yunck adds. "For one thing, it's a totally different approach," he says. "And it looks so cheap that no one can take it seriously." Atmospheric "sounders" on today's weather satellites can cost $300 million to $400 million each, he continues. The GPS receivers are roughly $100,000 apiece.

Attitudes are changing, however. In the early 1990s, US researchers lofted a small GPS receiver on a low-cost satellite as a proof-of-concept experiment. The results yielded temperature measurements that matched balloon-borne measurements with stunning accuracy. Subsequent satellite-borne experiments have been equally encouraging.

COSMIC is the first set of satellites dedicated to testing the technique's weather-forecast potential. The $100 million project is a joint effort between the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colo., and the government of Taiwan. Indeed, the Taiwanese, who call the mission Formosat 3, put up $80 million.

During the five-year mission, the COSMIC team will feed the satellites' measurements into forecast models, but the results won't be applied to operational forecasts until the team can gauge the effect they have. The first rule, Dr. Yunck says, is "do no harm."

If the technique proves as useful as previous experiments suggest, the team would like to see a new suite of satellites that could use signals from Europe's Galileo navigation satellites as well as the US GPS system. Such capabilities would double almost overnight the number of profiles the new weather satellites could take.

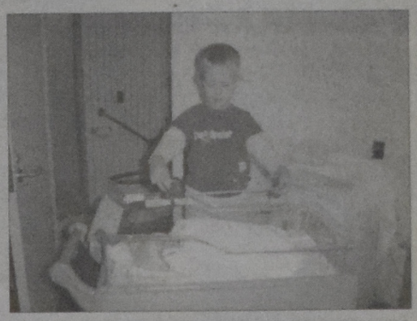
Some project advocates say the satellites will complement, not replace, the venerable weather balloons. Others say the days of the weather balloons are numbered.

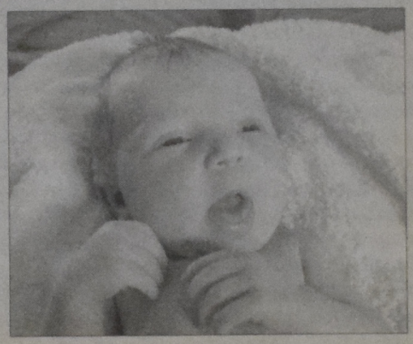
My window seat

Mendelt Hoekstra

Surprise!

Like most people I love a good surprise. Whether it is a surprise birthday party, an unexpected letter in the mail, or a child's sense of humor, a good surprise can put a new jump in your step. There are few great surprises in this world. Possibly the best surprise of all is the birth and expectancy of a child. Since I have told people that Marisa is expecting again, one of the first questions from others is, "Are you going to find out what sex the baby is?" My answer is, "Eventually." I have waited 32 years; I can wait a few more months.





Our nearly four-year-old son Zion, who loves to build and create, witnessed the midwives measuring Marisa's progress, so he asked if he could carry around a measuring tape to measure his new sibling. He carried it around for weeks. Last week when I asked him if he would like mommy to have a boy or a girl, which meant he was going to get a brother or a sister, he told me he wanted to have another sister. I was touched. Then I asked my two-year-old daughter if she would like a brother or a sister. She responded, "Cat."

She may be disappointed.

Our child's "due date" was May 24. Although this is an earthly term, it still can give us time to prepare for the upcoming arrival. Due dates are seldom right.

It was the night of May 11, a Thursday I'll never forget. I direct a high school choir at the local Christian High school where I was preparing for the evening's concert when Marisa called me to tell me she was six centimetres dilated. I rushed into the principal's office to tell him that he will have to run the concert solo as I was not going to miss what was about to happen. He readily agreed, gave me a verbal blessing and I was on my way. I met Marisa at the midwives office and off to the hospital we went.

At 10:37 p.m. on May 11, our baby was about to be born. When the baby's head came out, I was ready to catch our child. In our first two children's birth, I was blessed enough to catch each child and bring them to Marisa. When this baby's head came out, the midwives quickly realized that the umbilical cord was around her neck. The midwife immediately took over. I was asked to step aside as the midwife cut the umbilical cord, snatched our child and sounded the silent alarm that brought the pediatric team into the room in less than five seconds, and they began work on our child's air passage that was blocked.

It was the longest 60 seconds of my life. I stood there watching six people try to help our child take her first breath – and in that entire time, I didn't take one. After a minute our new daughter brought forth a wail that was beautiful music. She was breathing.

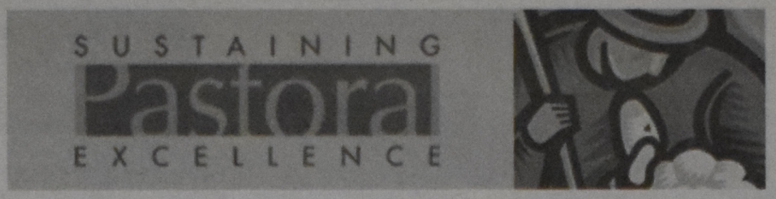
She. After all those weeks and months of wondering, waiting and speculating, we met our new daughter. It was one of life's greatest surprises. We welcomed Zekijah Jeannetta Monique into this world and prayed a blessing over her. I fell in love all over again.

God works in mysterious ways. Last June Marisa had a miscarriage. Had things gone the way Marisa and I wanted, we would have never met Zekijah. Now I couldn't imagine. Life, I love you.

Mendelt D. Hoekstra is the founder and director of the Music Therapy program at Bethesda, an organization owned and operated by the Mennonite Brethren Conference of Ontario, that supports adults with developmental possibilities. He lives in Vineland, ON with Marisa and their three children.

Pastoral care

Caring for Pastors



Bob Zomermaand

A couple of years ago, my wife and I were on a spiritual retreat at a haven for clergy outside of Milwaukee. We were there with several other evangelical pastoral couples from all over North America. One evening as we sat around the dinner table, the host posed this question, "What made you decide to get into the ministry in the first place? Or, What do you see in your spouse that led him/her into ministry?"

The question evoked a great deal of discussion as, for about two hours, we shared stories of the love for Jesus Christ and his Church, of our love for people and our desire to see them come to know Jesus, and to grow in their walk with him. We spoke of influences from family, from mentors, and from teachers who shaped our understanding of ourselves and our place in the family of God.

So why were we, then, at a retreat center? The question was posed to people who had an immense love for the church but who found themselves needing to back away from the front lines just for a week, for a bit of time to once again develop a perspective on why we were in the ministry. To tell the truth, we were all tired. Not just physically, but emotionally, and even spiritually. We found a sanctuary so that we could once again be a pillar of strength to the people God entrusted to us.

Ministry is one of the most demanding professions in the North American environment. It is a calling that provides men and women with a tremendous open door into the lives of everyday people. It is a profoundly satisfying task because pastors daily have opportunities to impact others for all eternity. Yet, in spite of its eternal implications, it is a wrenching and draining profession as well. Why? Because as pastors serve others they are very vulnerable to the temptations to over do, to over achieve, to over compensate, to over care for others.

This temptation comes in the form of the tentative knock on one's door and the timid query, "Pastor, can I talk to you about something?" It comes in the form of the phone call in the middle of the night informing the pastor that one of the close relatives of a parishioner has died tragically, "Could you go to inform the family?" It comes in the form of a council member seeking the pastor's advice on a serious issue in his family. "Could we keep this just between us, pastor? I don't want my family to know I spoke with you about this."

I call these examples "temptations," not because they are evil in themselves, rather it is because of the way we as pastors respond to them that they may become self-destructive. I believe there are appropriate ways to respond to these issues and there are inappropriate ways. Most pastors are very capable of handling these appropriately. But others have gotten to the point where their coping abilities have been so worn down they fall victim to the temptation to over do, over care, etc.

In evangelical circles in North America, far too many pastors are falling victim to the temptation to stretch themselves beyond a healthy point. I am convinced that a sizable percentage of pastors who fall morally do so not because they are so susceptible to some particular lure of the evil one, but because they have become so fatigued that they cannot recognize the deadly result of taking the bait. Pastors are drinking too much; they are eating too much; they are working too much; they are simply trying to find relief for their fatigue in all the wrong places.

I myself fell victim to the temptation to work too much. I became fatigued in my spirit, in my emotions, and in my body. I had overdone it all. As a result, I lost my ability to be a useful tool in the Lord's hand. The very thing I so desired to be and to do was beyond my reach. I was finally diagnosed with something I had never heard of – compassion fatigue. Compassion fatigue is a condition that affects those who are in helping professions such as social workers, ER personnel, and clergy(!). It is a condition that means the person is so spiritually, emotionally, and physically drained that he or she is no longer able to perform professional duties.

In my own life, it was not so much that I did not have spiritual resources any more; they were being depleted in ways that I did not understand. I wondered why my walk with God did not seem to enrich my heart in the ways it had. I felt almost normal physically. I had the energy to go about my daily grind but I did not feel like I had any of what might be called "vigor." My emotional tank, on the other hand, was dry. It was draining the life giving vitality of my physical self and spiritual self so that I was unable to experience the life for which God created me.

When I have told my story to laity from a variety of churches, they have asked me, "So tell us what we can do for our pastor! We're concerned that we are seeing some of that same thing in her or him!" Here are some suggestions:

1. Approach someone on the church governing board to ask them what the church is doing to make sure that your beloved pastor does not become overwhelmed with the tasks that fall to him or her. Compassion fatigue is something that accumulates in the pastor's inner being. When the pastor walks with a family through a devastating tragedy, the pastor shares some of the wounds. When a tragedy has taken place in the church's life, make sure the pastor gets some respite. Send him or her off to a retreat center for a week. You will be blessed!
2. In my particular denomination, we have an initiative called Sustaining Pastoral Excellence. As a part of that, we are encouraging pastors to become involved with other clergy in a peer learning group. This is a way for pastors to receive a blessing from other pastors as they get together to study something. As a side benefit they become people who care for each other in the tough times. Your pastor needs that! Make sure he or she has some time for being in a peer learning group. Sure it is time away from the church but your pastor will be better able to stay for the long haul. I think my grandmother called that, "A stitch in time, saves nine!"
3. Require your pastor to have not just a day off to get the household duties done but another day to be alone in God's holy presence. Those who treat compassion fatigue tell us that one of the best "cures" is the deepening of one's spiritual roots. Too often the overwhelmed pastor does not have enough time to go deep with God.
4. Be creative! You are the one who knows your pastor. Spend some money on a monthly morning at a relaxation spa for the pastor! Buy the pastor and spouse dinner for just the two of them. Sure you might like to go out with them but sometimes they need just each other! This will be money invested in your pastor's health. You will not regret it!

Being a pastor is a wonderfully rewarding calling but in our day it is becoming more difficult to sustain pastoral excellence. You can pave the way for excellence in your pastor! Look for the signs of compassion fatigue. Then do something to prevent the loss of another pastor to the temptation to over do the work of ministry.

Jogging yourself awake

Curt Gesch

I have nothing against jogging, but . . .

Perhaps I could even benefit from it, cardio-vascularly speaking. But there is a problem. It's almost impossible to hear enough things, to see enough things, while jiggling and jouncing along a park path, roadside, or sidewalk. Certainly those who insist on plugging in walkmen, discpersons, or MP3 players (whatever they are) exist in a universe that is not the same one they woke up to.

I have nothing against car rides; in fact I am rather partial to them. Living in northwest British Columbia, one can even see things (if not hear them) while riding on even our most advanced two-lane highways. Moose, for example, sometimes stand in the middle of the road. And bald eagles are quite hard to miss sitting on a post waiting for the ravens to have a turn feasting on the last moose that was standing in the middle of the road.

Robins and crows are pretty easy to see from a car or while jogging. And then there are plants. While driving one can see pine trees and those other evergreen types. Jogging in the park enables one to see tulips planted in beds, bedding plants planted in beds, grass growing all over in between trees, and sometimes even people using the lawns as beds.

But to see, to hear, to really be in the world we live in, I think we have to walk and to stop frequently. Here are some examples:

— I am driving down the highway through the small town of Telkwa at about 6:45 a.m. on the way to work. I see Mr. D., walking down the road margin (Telkwa isn't advanced enough to have sidewalks). He is wearing his European "flat" cap, his hands are clasped behind his back, his head moving from side to side as he takes in the day.

One day I am not working and so I stop in to have coffee and there is Mr. D. It turns out he is originally from Poland but has been living in Canada for many decades, recently retiring and moving to town. He has one of the best vegetable gardens in town. He nods or waves to everyone passing on the highway. He talks about the weather, when the trees are leafing out, whether they are early or late ("compared to the spring of '56").

Mr. D. is not a scientist, but is attuned to the rhythms of the local climate, plant, and animal life. He is no psychologist, but he knows that the people driving to work with coffee, a cigarette, and a cell-phone are missing something. He doesn't jog.

— I think of two different friends, both of whom are or were avid gardeners. Mr. M. loved having folks over for coffee. After a suitable number of cups had been drunk, Mr. M.– rain or shine – would invite me out to check the beans. Check the beans was, among other things, an invitation to walk outside for a smoke, not permitted in the house. So we walked, talked, and smoked. And looked at plants.

It was amazing to me that Mr. M. could know every

Creation care

vegetable plant in his garden. "This kale plant just isn't growing the way it is supposed to," he might remark. Or in winter. . . "I put a whole bunch of that compost right here where I'm growing the cauliflower next year 'cause that soil is a little lacking in fibre."

— Mr. V. is more of a scientist. He is an observer of his garden. "Hmm. You can see that this lily isn't getting anywhere because when I dug that bed last year I didn't break up the hardpan." Or, "Do you see that blight on the tomatoes? The ones closest to the property edge never get it as bad – the air circulation is better."

When Mr. V. returns from a holiday, the first thing he does, sometimes before the unpacking is finished, is to "do his rounds," walking slowly around the yard, looking at this, touching that, making comments on things whether or not anyone is there to hear them. Mr. V. has been known to jog, but never until his yard has been inspected and meditated upon.

— "I've got Ewald eyes," explained a child to an adult who just couldn't seem to see that coyote, the moose over there, or the shrike attacking the junco. "Ewald eyes," I found out when I moved to my present part of the world, refers to the ability of the late Mr. Glenn Ewald to see wildlife, to "read sign," to notice things in the world around him. Sometimes we suspected he saw things that were not there in order to test our gullibility, but we were never quite ready to call him an embroiderer of truth because – confound it! – after we looked carefully, or with binoculars, he was simply right so many times.

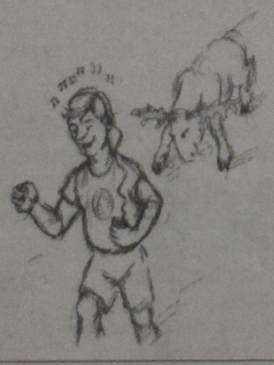
Ewald's eyes indicated something more significant: he lived in this world. He was able to sing "This Is My Father's World" because he knew his Father's world: the plants, the animals, his neighbors. That kind of knowing takes time, the kind of time spent walking and wondering, asking questions and noticing things.

Glenn told me about the time he finally did a little jogging. He had shot a moose at the close of the day, had gutted it and propped it open to cool and then got "turned around" in the forest at night. The day had started relatively mild, but by evening Glenn got cold, so cold that he knew only one thing to do: jog. So he jogged along one ridge, followed a small ravine, and jogged in his green knee-high hunting boots to the road and his vehicle. (This type of jogging is not recommended for the faint of heart.)

— Mr. and Mrs. G.– the author and his wife – drive past an intermittent, willowed-lined creek every day. They live in a birder's paradise but just don't seem to see all the warblers and other small birds that the local naturalists do. So they decide to try something radical. They stop the car. Turn it off. Wait. Look. Listen. Within a few moments they hear a ruby-crowned kinglet, spot two Wilson's warblers and one western wood pewee.

Total elapsed time? Perhaps five minutes, or about .35 percent of a day. About the same time it would have taken to watch one long commercial on television or put on one's jogging duds and wire up.

Country joggers beware: There are music critics everywhere.



BuildingTrust
Vicky Van Andel Ed.

Of Queen Rania and Synod 2006

Sometimes people ask me why I keep pushing for full participation of women in the Christian Reformed Church, when it is clear that the issue is divisive. My answer is that I keep working at it because I believe the church needs to be a strong advocate of gender equality, and serve as a witness of gender equality to the world at large. Inequality is the root of many of problems in the world. This issue reaches far beyond the church.

A few weeks ago I inadvertently watched two very prominent women being interviewed on TV. The women were Queen Rania of Jordan and President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf of Libera. I enjoyed the interview. Both women were committed to the importance of gender equality and spoke passionately about the need for equal opportunities for women around the world.

Queen Rania is married to King Abdullah of Jordan and has four young children. She was a very effective communicator because she said many things I still remember. These are some of her comments: "Mothers are the same all over the world. They all want the best for their children. When you educate girls, you educate the future. Educated women will do everything in their power to make it possible for their children get an education. Education empowers people, education gives them a chance." She also said: "Poverty is a she. It affects women and condemns them to lives of misery."

HM Queen Rania on the Oprah show

Most likely Queen Rania was thinking of women living in developing countries. But her statements also apply to poor women in our western world. In our society there are also many women struggling every day to make ends meet, feed their children and provide a roof over their heads. Often they are single parents working on a minimum wage or receiving social assistance. Each city and town in Canada has them. Their lives are hard. Poverty has a way of reducing people and dis-empowering them.

I am confronted with the effects of poverty on a regular basis these days because I work as a nurse in an inner city drug and alcohol detoxification center. I see many people from all levels of society. The majority of people I care for are poor. I am struck by their many unmet needs and their inability to create a better life. I am also struck by how easily our structured social system works against disadvantaged people rather than helps them. Poverty quickly becomes a negative life cycle, re-enforcing a life-long pattern of helplessness.

Besides speaking out about women, Queen Rania expressed a desire to consciously work at bridging misunderstandings between eastern and western cultures. As a Caucasian woman who has adopted the Muslim faith, she understands both cultures. In her words: "In our global society we have to live side by side and learn to tolerate diversity. We are all global citizens and our world is interconnected." She worries about mutual misunderstandings between Arab and western people. She says that Muslims think that the West is not interested in them and biased against them. "It is a misconception that Arabs are extremists and a violent people. It is also a misconception that Arab women are oppressed because they wear a veil. For Jordanian women, the veil is not a sign of oppression. Women have a choice, and 60 per cent of Jordanian women choose to wear it." She herself does not. According to Queen Rania, "Women should not be judged for what is on top of their heads, but rather for what is in their heads."

President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf of Liberia expressed similar views during the interview. She is newly elected, and the first woman president of an African country. She talked about her support for education programs for all children. She especially stressed the importance of educating girls. "Girls easily get left behind," she says. While she spoke a short film clip appeared on the screen showing a smiling little girl from Liberia boldly stating that if a woman can be a president, she can become anything.

I was pleased at the overt expression by these women of the global need to advocate for women. They were interviewed by Oprah Winfrey on the same show. I was impressed by their courage and dedication to serving people less advantaged. Both women live privileged lives and they know it. They consider it their responsibility to use their position of influence to be a blessing to others and to make the world a better place. "It is not what you are but what you do," says Queen Rania. "The only thing we take with us are our good deeds."

These women reminded me of my own role in life. I, too, can make this world a better place. In many ways. When it comes to gender equality, it is tempting to be complacent in our culture because it appears we have overcome that issue. But we should not take it for granted. Women easily get left behind, also in our society. Gender fairness calls for on-going creative tension in our homes, the workplace, and yes, also in our beloved church. We need to keep working at it.

At Synod 2005 it was decided to close the discussion on whether women should be allowed to serve as delegates to synod until half of the 47 classes favored deleting the word *male* from Church Order Article 3a. Right now 25 out of 47 Classes have voted to delete the word *male*. So, the discussion is back on the agenda of Synod 2006 which meets in June.

I hope that Synod will take a bold step forward and make a clear decision to delete the word *male* from the Church Order. Procedure calls for changes to the church order to be approved a year later. I hope that a definite proposal is made this year and that that proposal is adopted next year at Synod 2007. I also hope the change can be proposed without creating another study committee. It would not be helpful to have yet one more debate. With more than half the classes in favor it is clear the church has moved on.

I will think of the delegates Synod 2006 and pray for them. May God bless them and keep them, and give them wisdom and grace.

Vicky Van Andel is the editor of this column. Anyone who would like to contribute to this column is invited to contact her via e-mail at: vickyv@telus.net

Opinion

Welcome to my perch
Bert Witvoet

In their hands they're holding palms of victory

Bert Witvoet

We witnessed a profession of faith ceremony in our church last Sunday. This was not the full class of "candidates" that our pastor has been teaching in his new members class. That group will come before us on Pentecost Sunday. This was a young couple in their early thirties who had been led through some painful experiences to a place where they could embrace the love of Christ, or should I say, where they could acknowledge that a loving Christ had embraced them. After they made their faith known and pledged themselves to a life of discipleship, their two children were baptised.

I can see why the pastor decided to set the couple and their children apart from the larger group. This was a special moment in the life of the couple as well as of the community. It deserved to be highlighted. What made the occasion so special was that both spouses had their own conversion story to tell. She had grown up in a single-parent family and had become involved in a sinful life style; he had grown up as a CRC kid who went sour on the Christian community. Both of them had neglected the spiritual side of their relationships. Both of them came to the Lord in different ways.

Without denying the importance of the wife's story, I would like to focus on the husband's story in this column. I do so because his story touches on an important failure and success of our Christian community.

Active alienation

His parents had sent him and his sister to the Christian school. For him that decision led to years of frustration and pain. He was taller than anyone else in the class, and he was bullied. I hesitate to say that he was bullied because of his size. Bullying is usually a bit more complex than that. But, needless to say, the boy was deeply hurt by how his classmates treated him or did not stand up for him.

His parents noticed the effects in his behavior. For one, he stopped singing in church. For him, that was not just normal teenage shyness or a desire for "coolness" that causes so many other teenagers to keep their mouths shut (or chewing) during congregational singing. His non-singing was an act of rebellion and a statement of alienation. It was the more unusual because he loved singing and his family was a musical family.

There were other indications in his life that he was very unhappy. He became critical of the church and of the whole Christian community. The fact that his church went through a schism at that time and that he saw and heard people fighting over the purity or lack of purity of the church did not exactly help matters.

Welcome acceptance

Upon graduation from the Christian elementary school, his parents gave him a choice: Christian high school or public high school? He chose a public high school. He did not regret his choice. The high school he chose was big enough to allow him to find a peer group. He felt accepted. This school, because it was big and contained students from all kinds of backgrounds, did not judge "otherness" to be the kind of problem that a smaller school with less variety in student background often thinks it is. Besides, his height became less outstanding as other boys also gained in stature.

So the boy thrived emotionally in his new environment, and he turned his back on Christianity. He met the girl he eventually married, and together they struck out on their own, without God's help, thank you very much. But they did not live immoral lives, he told us at their profession of faith ceremony. The values they had learned at home stuck with them. They were just a decent, good, upright unsaved couple.

However, the problem with rebels is that they do not acknowledge their own sinfulness. Satan gives them a buy-out: "You stare yourselves blind at what they have done to you, and don't worry about yourself."

God at work

But some things happened on their way to an encounter with Jesus. The wife developed cancer. She had to undergo treatment. In the meantime, his former church community brought them meals. Wow! Why did they do that! They weren't even attending church, except for Christmas and Easter maybe. She eventually recovered and has been cancer free for several years.

Then a second tragedy struck. His foster brother committed suicide. This hit him very hard. He had grown up with this boy. Gradually the hearts of the husband and wife were softened. They began to realize that perhaps there were forces at work in their lives that were bigger than they were. Spiritual independence lost it luster.

They attended an Alpha program at his former church. And, more importantly, they felt accepted by the Christian community. God, who had allowed Satan to alienate the young man from the Christian community, partly because of a failure of community during a vulnerable time in his life, now used the Christian community – the more mature part of the Christian community – to bring him back into the fold, and with him, his wife. Actually, his wife led the way with her belief that her husband was making things too complicated with all his questions about the faith. She said to him that it was really quite simple: "Jesus loves me."

No guarantees

As I listened to the young man telling us his story, my heart felt sad. It felt sad for him that he had to undergo rejection. But it also felt sad for the failure of the Christian school. I have always been very much involved in Christian education. I am and always will be a strong proponent of Christian schooling for our children. I reflected on how much energy and resources have gone into the building and maintenance of Christian schools, Christian curriculum, Christian discipline.

But there is one thing we have not succeeded in doing during all these years of developing Christian schooling, and that is, we have not been able to keep out sin. No matter how hard we try as parents and teachers, Satan will find a way to lure some of our children (the bullies and the bullied) away from the riches of the Kingdom of Heaven.

I must add that in today's schools much more attention is being paid to bullying. But bullying can be so subtle. Besides, how can anyone enforce that Christian love and mercy be applied by all students in the classroom? No, I'm afraid part of the Christian community will continue to enable Satan to do his destructive work. But it's good to realize that Satan will not have the last word. In this case, God worked out his plan of salvation in his usually wondrous and timely way.

Pope Benedict XVI walks through the entrance of Auschwitz.

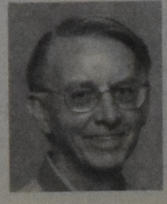
You know what produced the crowning touch at this Profession of Faith event at our church? The young man had asked his father to bring his guitar and to sing a song with him during the service. It's always touching to see a father and his adult son united that way. But when you think of how the boy stopped singing years ago, and how he now felt compelled to sing out his gratitude to his heavenly Father, along with his earthly father, well that's like climbing Mount Everest.

Place of memory

I read in my newspaper that the Pope visited Auschwitz on the same day that the young couple professed their faith. If you want to see a place where Satan was really given loose rein, you could not find a better location. This is what the Pope had to say about his visit: "The place where we are standing is a place of memory…. The past is never simply the past. It always has something to say to us: it tells the paths to take and the paths not to take."

And so the Profession of Faith we witnessed became a place of memory, too. And what this young couple, and perhaps we as well, learned from the past is the paths to take and the paths not to take.

Did I mention that on the same day the St. Catharines CRC community celebrated Jesus' ascension into heaven in a joint evening service? The pastor had a strong message on the benefits of this ascension. Afterwards we sang one of my favorite hymns: "By the Sea of Crystal." (I used to sing this song as a member of the Back to God Hour choir back in the '50s, so it has sentimental value for me, too. My mother, who would listen to the Back to God Hour radio broadcast every Sunday morning, was sure she could pick out my tenor voice in what the conductor had intended to be a harmonious blend of voices). But the words echoed what had transpired that morning in our church: "Out of tribulation, death and Satan's hand, they [this young couple, too] have been translated [a nice word to indicate conversion as well as final redemption] at the Lord's command…. God has wrought salvation; he did wondrous things. Who shall not extol thee, holy King of kings!"



Bert Witvoet is a former editor of CC, retired, and now editing the Christian Educators Journal, *preaching the occasional sermon and prodding the local Chr. School board.*

Business Directory

Consumer choice and 'Frankenstein foods'

Europeans scornfully dub them "Frankenfood." So it's not surprising some European environmentalists and leaders have reacted strongly to a WTO ruling that favors these supposed monsters, or genetically modified foods.

These critics charge that by declaring a de facto European Union ban on genetically modified organisms (GMOs) to be a violation of global trade laws, the World Trade Organization is forcing unwanted products from the US and other agricultural exporters onto European consumers.

But Europeans have strict labeling requirements that must identify such foods, and neither shoppers nor farmers have to buy food or seeds they don't want.

What the ruling did do is separate the politics and emotion of this issue from the science and business of it – a useful service.

Even though the EU ended its GMO moratorium in 2004, five European countries still ban GMOs and appear to be in violation of the ruling. By clarifying a question of trade, and not food safety, the WTO has reinforced the rules of commerce concerning GMOs, which, importantly, also include European safety review. Only by allowing this trade mechanism to work freely can GMO producers and consumers get the consideration they both deserve.

So far, science and trade favor the current generation of GMOs, which include plant products such as maize, cotton, and soybeans. In the US, about 45 percent of maize, 76 percent of cotton, and 85 percent of soybeans are genetically altered.

Such products are grown in 21 countries, with Brazil almost doubling its production last year. Now China is stepping up government research into developing a strain of rice that's rich in vitamin A.

By using engineered plants that resist insects and disease, and that can tolerate pesticides or herbicides used to kill weeds, farmers can increase yields and income.

Meanwhile, scientific bodies around the world have generally concluded that this first generation of products – planted widely starting 10 years ago – is safe.

Yet the issue remains highly political and emotional in Europe.

Fewer than one percent of Americans see food biotechnology as a safety concern, but 54 percent of people in the 25-nation EU do. A series of high-profile food scares has spooked Europeans, and they don't particularly trust their relatively new Europe-wide food safety authority.

But they're also concerned about possible environmental problems of GMOs and long-term health effects, which are difficult to research.

Another problem posed by GMOs is the patent on the seed. For non-GMO crops farmers could use the seed produced by their own crops. With the patented seed, this is illegal, posing a huge problem for poor farmers, especially in the developing world.

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Classifieds

Birth

On Sunday May 7, 2006
God gave us our fourth grandchild

Jacob Kenneth

weighing 10 lbs. 10 oz.
Parents: Ray & Teresa Van Ommen.
A brother for David, Virginia and Benjamin.
Sixth granchild for Nell Parrish.
Great-grandson for Jake & Bea VanderKooy
Grandparents: Ben & Willy Van Ommen
63 Cedar St, Geulph ON N1G 1C4

Anniversaries

June 2, 2006
We joyfully announce the
50th Wedding Anniversary of

HANK AND ANN DE RUITER

We are thankful to the LORD and pray that he will continue to bless them.

With love from yur children and grandchildren
Yolanda & Randy Motley, *Brampton*
Jeremy and Natasha
Henry de Ruiter, *Brampton*

Address: 23 Stillwater Cres,
Brampton ON L6X 1K6

Anniversaries

1956 May 25 2006

But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added to you. Mt. 6:33

With thankfulness to God for his gracious care,
we wish to announce the **50th Anniversary**
of our parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents,

PETER AND RITA SCHARRINGA (nee **Rustenburg**)

With love,
Ed & Elaine Scharringa, *Waterdown, ON*
Janelle & Ray Elgersma, Connor, Owen; Mike & Angela; Christa & Lucas Miedema, Kayden; Andrea (Al), Ben, Lisa.
Paul Scharringa (†Denise, 1998), *Norwich, ON*
Jennifer & Marcus (fiancee), Jeff (Jenna), Yvonne, Danelle, Jonathan
Rob & BettyAnn Scharringa, *Waterdown, ON*
Marsha & Mike Lobbezoo, Michaela; Will & Sarah (fiancee); Brenda & Kevin Sinke, Julie (Paul), Rob
Richard & Andrea Scharringa, *New Dundee, ON*
Matthew (Kelly), Brad, Amy, Aaron
Helene & Ko Tamminga, *Brantford, ON*
Leanne (Phil), Anita, Melissa, Stephen
Pete & Gerdy Scharringa, *Ariss, ON*
Peter, Derek, Jason, Nathan, AnnaMarie, Mark
Calvin & Karen Scharringa, Ryan, Nick, Brittany

Address: 555 Millgrove Side Rd RR2, Waterdown ON L0R 2H2

Strathroy 1956 June 22 Sarnia 2006

MARTIN AND NELLIE TAMMING (HUIZINGA)

With thanksgiving to God, we are pleased to announce the **50th Wedding Anniversary** of our parents and grandparents.

May the Lord bless you Mom and Dad.
Love: John & Terry
Jack & Michele
Rob & Jeannette
Janet & Ed
Patricia & Bob
and 13 grandchildren

Open house on June 24 from 2-4 p.m.
at Redeemer Christian Reformed Church
Blackwell Rd, Sarnia
Best Wishes Only

Home address: 1083 Murphy Rd
Sarnia ON N7S 2Y4

1956 June 15 2006
Acton, Ontario Bowmanville, Ontario

Exodus 33:15
If your presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here.

Congratulations Mom & Dad/Grandma & Grandpa
on your **50th Wedding Anniversary**

CLARENCE and ETTY DEVRIES (nee **STULP**)

May God continue to bless and
keep you both in his love and care.

With much love from your children:
Lloyd & Marg Devries
Fred & Marian Devries
Jeanette & Art Boekee
John & Jennifer Devries
15 grandchildren & 2 great-grandchildren

Home address: 29 Parkway Cres
Bowmanville ON L1C 1B9

Obituaries

ELLEN VAN TIL (Van Harmelen)

went to be with Jesus on Good Friday, 2006.
"A great woman, a gift from God."
We thank God for releasing her from suffering but miss her terribly.

John Van Til, 1636 Borden Street, *London ON* N5W 2R4
Gloria & Brian Lubben; Michael, Rachel, Daniel, *Grand Rapids, MI*
Reuel Van Til; Jessica and Kyle; Kayden, *London, ON*
John & Joanne Van Til; Rebecca, Katie, *Oshawa, ON*
Elaine & Greg May, Lauren, Anna, Evan, Olivia, *Memphis, TN*
Brenda & Joel Moniz, Faith, *London, ON*

In Loving Memory of

ELISABETH VANDERPLOEG (Miedema)

September 6, 1926 - May 21, 2006
Beloved wife of Gerrit VanderPloeg.
Dear mother of: Phyllis & her husband David Lovell of *Owen Sound,*
Alma & her husband Durk DeVries *of Shallow Lake,*
Willard & his wife Ingrid *of Owen Sound* and
mother-in-law of Elaine VanderPloeg *of Shallow Lake.*
Sadly missed by fifteen grandchildren & nine great-grandchildren.
Also survived by her sisters Anna, Joanne, Carol and brother Sidney.
Predeceased by her son Stanley.

A funeral service was held on Thursday, May 25th
with Rev. George Holthof officiating.

Correspondence address: Gerrit VanderPloeg
166 4th Avenue SW, Owen Sound ON N4K 5T7

1926 The Netherlands May 21 Owen Sound, On 2006

Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi

After a very active life dedicated to Kingdom and country and courageously enduring the numbing effects of a devastating stroke for the last six years, God called home our dear sister and sister-in-law

ELISABETH VANDER PLOEG - nee **Miedema**

Cor & Grada Vander Ploeg, *Brampton, On*
Janna Dijkstra - Vander Ploeg, *Berlikum, Fr.*
John & Anna Vander Ploeg, *Shallow Lake*
Ray & Helen Vander Ploeg, *Woodstock, On*
Dirk & Elisabeth Vander Ploeg, *Kemble, On*
Ralph & Alice Vander Ploeg, *Shallow Lake, On*
Nephews & Nieces

May the Lord comfort her husband Gerrit,
children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren

1941 May 29 2006

With great thankfulness to God we are pleased to announce the **65th Wedding Anniversary** of our parents

WILLEM AND ASKE BRAAN (nee **Haan**)

Psalm 143:9b

We pray that God will bless and keep them in his care.
Hilda(†with the Lord 1996) Jim & Jane vander Voort, *Orillia, ON*
Margaret & Steve Klingenberg
John, Angela, Luke, Samantha
James & Christine vander Voort
Heather, Holly, Caroline, Jay
Angela & Siebren Boersma
Samuel, Isaac, Esther
Hayley
Harold & Grace Braam, *Mannheim, On*
Douglas & Suzanne– Noah Elijah, Carina, Silas
Ken & Diane –Terah, Amanda
Sheila Braam & Adrian Jones
Dick & Betsy Braam, *Georgetown, ON*
Jason & Retisny – Evan, Emilia
Sarah & Joshus de Boer – Isaac
Ryan & Hannah – Zachary, Janae
Mary & Gerry Bontius, *Woodbridge, ON*
Ken
Kevin
Steve & Janice – Adrian, Jacob, Tyler
Suzanne & Rob Takacs
Mark
Address: HCH HT#509 - 7900 McLaughlin Rd S
Brampton ON L6Y 5A7

We apologize for not including this picture in the last issue.

We, the children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of

LEO AND TENA BATTERINK

are pleased to announce their
60th Wedding Anniversary on June 14, 2006.
We thank God for his faithfulness and goodness!

Ed & Mary Faber, *Strathroy, ON*
Heather & Tim Graves, *Richmond Hill, ON*
Mitchell, Dana, and Kendra
Tim & Leanne, *Scarborough, ON*
Ryan & Jody, *Pella IA*
Evan and Graeme
Jon & Jill, *Toronto, ON*
Annette Westra, *Strathroy, ON*
Ian, *Strathroy, ON*
Leona, *Calgary, AB*
Len & Nienke, *Rocky Mountain House, AB*
Marie & Matthew Klaponski, *Vancouver, BC*
Jacob
Jen, *Vancouver, BC*
Josh, *Victoria, BC*
Kristin, *Rocky Mountain House, AB*
Clarence & Jeri, *Hamilton, ON*
Melanie, *Barrie, ON*
Kyle, *Hamilton, ON*

An **Open House** will be held at Trillium Village
400 Dominion St. Strathroy, ON on
Wednesday, June 14, 2006 from 2 - 4 p.m.

Address: #153 - 400 Dominion Street, Strathroy ON N7G 3G3

3 FREE ISSUES

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Classifieds

DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION: *Christian Courier* is published on alternate Mondays. Copy deadline for each issue is 9 a.m. Tuesday, 13 days prior to publication date.
RATE: (GST added to rates listed)
All personal and family announcements: $6.00 per square inch. **rose@christiancourier.ca**
Display advertising re. businesses and organizations: $8.00 per square inch. **ads@christiancourier.ca**
PHOTOS: There is a processing fee of $25 for the inclusion of a photograph with a personal or family announcement. Photo space is not charged per square inch but we reserve the right to determine published photo size. Please note that we cannot use a faxed photo. We need either an original photo (which we will return) or a downloadable internet image.
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OTHER INFORMATION: *Christian Courier* reserves the right to print classifieds using our usual format and editing style and is not responsible for any errors due to hand-written or phoned-in advertisements.

Retirement

You are invited to an
OPEN HOUSE
to celebrate the retirement of

RITA AALBERS

Saturday, June 24th from 2:00 p.m. till 4:00 p.m.
at Strathroy Community Christian School
7880 Walkers Drive, Strathroy, Ontario

Classifieds / Job Opportunities

Vacation rentals

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Welkom

Job Opportunities

A client is **seeking contact** with individuals who have taken courses in **journalism and Dutch history** in the Netherlands. Fluency in Dutch and English is a requirement as is media experience and proficiency with standard computer programs in the newspaper industry.

Client is contemplating long-term staffing and other options.

Please direct all correspondence in writing to:

Ken Bulthuis, BBA, CA
Vander Molen, Mackenzie, Bulthuis
Chartered Accountants
Suite 130, 5769 - 201A Street
Langley, BC Canada V3A 8H9

HOPE DROP-IN CENTRE,
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Email your interest (and resume or other details) to
John_Van_Egmond@egmondassociates.com
You can mail us at *Coordinator Search Committee*
Hope Drop In Centre
160 Main St South Unit 25A, Brampton ON L6W 2E1
Phone: 905-790-2273

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
THE LIGHTHOUSE CHRISTIAN CENTRE

The Lighthouse ministry is a multicultural Christian Community Centre in downtown Toronto, with the mission to show God's love in action to the new immigrant, the refugee, and the poor.

The Lighthouse invites applications for the position of Executive Director. Applicants should have strong management skills, including leadership, team building, public relations, finance, and fund-raising abilities. Related experience in social work will be an asset. A job description is available through ben@lighthousecentre.ca

If you seek to serve Jesus Christ in an outreach ministry, please mail your application, including covering letter and resume, to:

Peter Jagt, Secretary of The Board
154 Cottonwood Drive
Don Mills ON M3C 2B4

Woodland Christian High School
is inviting application for the position of
teaching principal, effective August 1, 2007.

Woodland Christian High School is an interdenominational community of 200 students and 16 teachers, located in newly upgraded facilities in a beautiful rural setting just east of Kitchener, Ontario, Canada. It is currently in its 30th year of operation. The principal is part of a dynamic administrative team within a very supportive and growing school community.

If you would like to learn more about Woodland Christian High School, you are invited to visit the website at www.woodland.on.ca.

Applications and inquiries may be directed to:
Search Committee
Woodland Christian High School
1058 Spitzig Road, Breslau, ON N0B 1M0
or search@woodland.on.ca.

Applications will be received until September 30, 2006

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DIRECTOR OF YOUTH MINISTY
Covenant Christian Reformed Church in Woodstock,Ontario

We are looking for a **Youth Director** (50% position) who exhibits a vibrant personal faith, relates well to youth, shows maturity in character, and is committed to the Reformed faith. Primary responsibilities include leading, nurturing and inspiring children, youth and young adults by word and example into a closer relationship with God and others. Applicants must be able to work cooperatively, show strong leadership, communication, and organizational skills and have some experience in leading youth programs.

Ideally, the candidate should possess a B.A., including training in youth ministry, education, Bible, and theology. Musical abilities would be an asset.

Please send letter and resume to:
Covenant CRC, Attn: Search Committee
410 Lansdowne Ave. Woodstock ON N4S 1J2
or email to: **woodcovadmin@bellnet.ca**

FIRST HAMILTON CRC
in downtown Hamilton has an opening for a
part -time Youth Ministries Coordinator.

This position is responsible for the coordination of the Church's youth discipleship programs (i.e. Nursery, Sunday School, Youth Group). The successful applicant should possess leadership and administrative skills, experience working with and relating well to youth, a commitment to the Reformed tradition and a missional understanding of the church.
Interested applicants may contact the church office at **(905) 528-3826** or email **office@firsthamilton.ca** for a complete job description or further information.
Applications should be received by June 26, 2006.

The Board of Directors of the Ontario Christian School Teachers Association (OCSTA) invites applications for the position of

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Executive Director's responsibilities are to implement the aims and objectives of OCSTA, which are:

- to promote and to improve Christian education in Ontario
- to foster a high standard of ethics for its members
- to promote a high standard of professional training and conduct
- to strive for a worthy socio-economic position for its members

The Executive Director is expected to articulate a Christian perspective which is current and focused on the place and service of OCSTA members in their workplaces and in the greater community by means of various promotion opportunities as they occur or are created.

A successful candidate has:

- a commitment to Jesus as Lord and Saviour
- a range of teaching/administrative experience in Christian education
- integrity in leading and learning
- strong people skills

Interested persons should forward their applications (C.V., including complete references from three sources) to:

OCSTA Executive Director Search Committee
777 Garner Road East, Ancaster, ON L9K 1J4 or at
edsearchcommittee@ocsta.org

For more information regarding the position, contact Hilda Roukema at 905.648.1200 or hroukema@ocsta.org

Applications for the position will be received until November 1, 2006. Interviews will be held in January 2007. Duties to commence August 1, 2007.

Classifieds

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Sun. 19:00hrs
(Zingend Geloven)
19:30 (Holland Calling)
VANCOUVER, BC - CJVB 1470AM
Mon - Wed. 20:00-21:00hrs
EDMONTON, AB - CKER 101.9FM
Sat. 09:00-10:00hrs
(Religious)
10:00-12:00hrs
(50's-70'sDutch Pop Music)
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WINNIPEG, MB - CKJS 910AM
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Events/Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

June 10 Retirement celebration and open house for Aneta Zondervan and Keith Groen, 7 pm, **Chatham** Christian School. For information, call 1-519-352-4980

June 14 Hollandse Dag, 10 a.m. at 310 Kingscourt Ave, **Kingston**, Ont. Speaker: James Kooistra. For information, contact E. Hiddema at 613-546-5615

June 14 Hollandse Day, **Moorefield**, Ont. Community Centre, 10 a.m. See ad for details.

July 1 Frisian Picnic, 11 a.m. at Pinehurst Conservation Park, Hwy 24, 6.4 kilometers north of Paris, Ont. .

July 2 Dutch Service will be held in the **Ancaster** Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. John Klomps will be preaching.

July 2 Frisian Day Service. Foargonger: Ds. J.D. Hellinga. Snein de neimiddeis om trije ure yn de Maranatha Reformeare Tsjerke, 577 Norwich Ave (off 401), **Woodstock**, Ont.

Oct 27-29 Hamilton District Christian High School 50th anniversary weekend. For information about activities or to register as alumni: www.hdch.org or 905.648.6655

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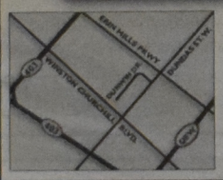

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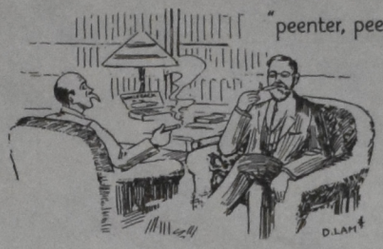
"peenter, peeperhenger, dikkereeter," sage

Dirk Nieland



This work is a celebration of Yankee Dutch, the colorful language spoken by thousands of Hollanders after immigrating to America. Written in a peculiar English with Dutch spellings, Dirk Nieland's *'n Fonnie Bisnis* recounts the humorous adventures of Loe Verlak, the prototypical Dutch immigrant, as he gets into all sorts of "funny business" around his community. Nieland's fourteen vignettes touch on a wide variety of Dutch-American life, from Sunday school picnics to everyday jobs to the joys and trials of marriage.

Including a foreword (in plain English) by George G. Harper and an extensive vocabulary chart, this new edition also features an audio CD of selected chapters that will delight anyone interested in Dutch-American people, language, and culture.

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(Of course you'll like this book!)
— LOE VERLAK

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No pets please

DUTCH SERVICE
will be held in the Ancaster Christian Reformed Church
July 2 at 3:00 p.m.
Rev. John Klomps will be preaching.

FRISIAN PICNIC
Saturday, July 1, 2006
starting at 11 a.m.
at Pinhurst Conservation Park,
Paris, Ont.
on Highway 24A (4 miles north of Paris)

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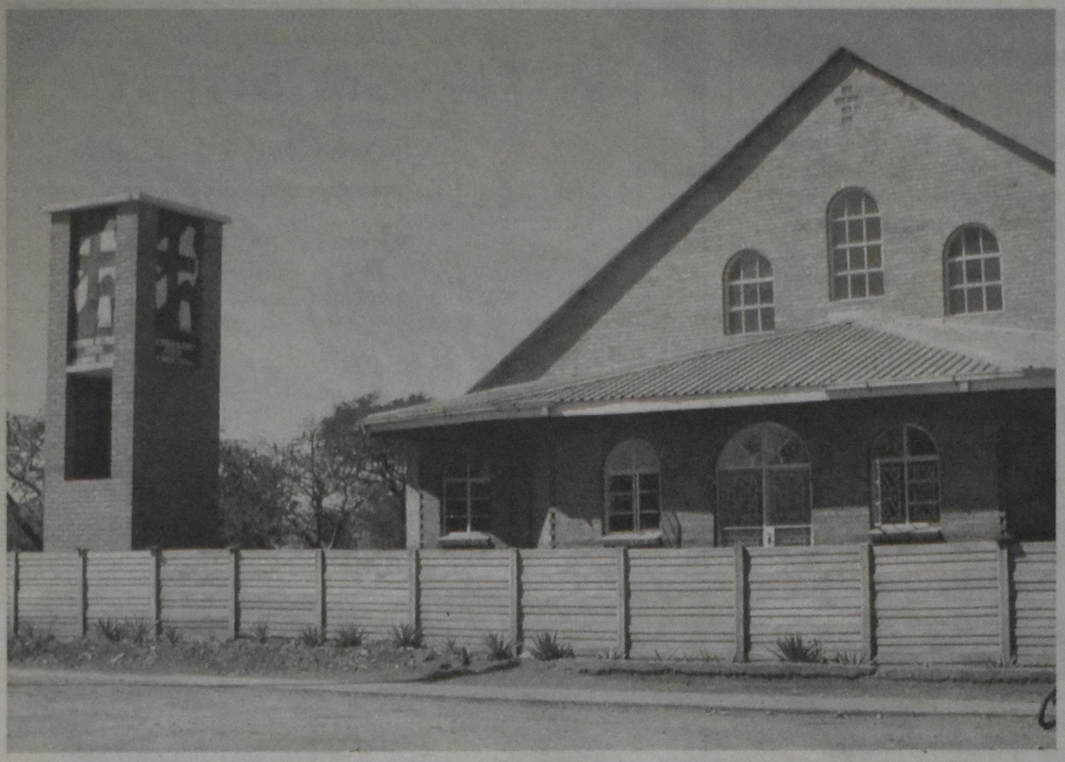

Zimbabweans flock to church as inflation tops 1,000 percent

HARARE (IRIN) – Each Sunday morning in the Zimbabwean capital, Harare, churches across the city are full of swaying, clapping congregations: US-style evangelism is booming, complete with charismatic preachers, live bands, and the faithful falling to the floor and speaking in tongues.

With the economy in its sixth year of recession and inflation climbing beyond 1,000 percent, religion has become a refuge for many Zimbabweans, bewildered by their ever-deepening impoverishment in what was once a thriving country.

Even top-ranking politicians in the ruling ZANU-PF, veterans of Zimbabwe's liberation war and former Socialists, have turned to God, perhaps gaining new respect as men and women of the cloth.

Vice-President Joseph Msika was recently ordained as a lay pastor in the Anglican church; second Vice-President Joyce Mujuru was promoted to captain in the Salvation Army; two cabinet ministers have applied to train as priests.

Even Emmerson Mnangagwa, the powerful former intelligence chief backed by many to succeed President Robert Mugabe despite his repeated poor showing at the ballot box, has announced he was 'born again'.

"I think their consciences are troubling them. They have a lot of tension and stress because they have no idea which way the country should be driven," suggested Prof Gordon Chavunduka, a sociologist and labor consultant.

It is difficult to escape Zimbabwe's new religious revival. The two songs topping the current music chart are gospel tunes; evangelical preachers are on TV daily; political rallies, and even military parades, are now enlivened with songs of praise.

Sometimes more down-to-earth material needs – and the hope of divine help to ease the difficulties of living in present-day Zimbabwe – seem to be at the heart of this spiritual awakening.

"The number of new church members that we are getting is amazing. The majority of our members are women and the youth; their reasons for joining are varied, but they all have expectations, like being healed of illnesses, finding jobs, and other personal expectations like finding a potential life partner," said Paul Mnyaka, an elder at New Ministries, a Pentecostal church in Harare.

Churches have not been slow to recognize the needs of their congregations. "Attend the crusade and learn how to survive in a high inflationary environment," read one flyer advertising a revival meeting in the Midlands city of Gweru.

Another Pentecostal church places weekly newspaper adverts to attract new members. "I was a prostitute but I have now repented. I have now been blessed with a husband, children and a good job," is the supposed testimony of one young woman.

With the extended family system buckling under the pressure of the economic crisis, churches have become sanctuaries, said Chavunduka.

But the Rev Aspher Madziyire, president of the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe, one of the fastest growing churches, denies a link between material needs and new-found faith.

"In addition to the more than 2.5 million members that we have in Zimbabwe, we have opened so many branches in countries like the United Kingdom, the USA, Australia and New Zealand. If it is a question of economic hardship, why would people in countries with such powerful currencies flock to church? They go to church because they realize that there is a vacuum in their lives, which they need to fill with God," he told IRIN.

"It is written in the Bible that towards the end of the world, God would pour his Holy Spirit on his people, and even those people that you would not expect to repent have done so," Madziyire said.

News Digest

Lemons are not just lemons

Red wine, coffee, tea and cranberry juice have all been celebrated by the poets of food and nutrition. Now it is the turn of the lowly lemonade. Not only can it cool you and quench your thirst on a torrid summer day, lemonade, it turns out, may save from torments more excruciating than childbirth – that is, those nasty little things called kidney stones.

Lemonade increases the amount of urinary citrate, which keeps the stones from forming. Researchers even noted that in some people existing kidney stones decreased in size. But you can't just pick up a bottle of your favorite lemon-flavored soft drink, warned the researchers, that will only get you extra sugar and calories. It has to be genuine lemon juice.

Those participating in the study quaffed about 4 oz of lemon juice. No, not straight – they mixed it with something else. I'm thinking tea and water here, not vodka.

For a happy marriage, make it one of each

Don't ask me who funds these studies and why, but here's an Australian one that suggests that if you're going to have two children, make it one of each. Families consisting of one boy and one girl, it turns out, have a lower divorce rate than those with two children of the same sex.

Andrew Leigh, an Australian economist, analyzed 60,000 families between 1981 and 2001 to find out whether parents' decision to get married, stay married or divorce was related to the sex of their children. He found a statistical difference and thus concluded that, yes, the sex of their children had a significant impact on their parents' marital status.

I wonder whether anyone is planning to do a study to find out whether parents with blond, blue-eyed children are more likely to divorce than those with black-haired, brown eyed children. I'm almost sure there would be a statistical difference.

Those who end up with two girls could always turn one into a tomboy to statistically increase their chances of a happy and enduring marriage. Or drink lots of lemonade. People with kidney stones probably make lousy spouses too.

Those rascally quarks

Do you know anything about quarks? No, it doesn't have anything to do with your cousin's obnoxious kids. It's about nuclear physics. Remember learning that the nucleus of every atom consists of protons and neutrons?

When I was in school, protons were considered basic building blocks, but physicists concluded they were composed of something even smaller, and these smaller things – if we can call them things – they called quarks. Each proton consists of three quarks. But if you total the weight of three quarks, you get only 1.5 per cent of the proton's weight. This has long mystified physicists.

Mothers would have concluded that those rascally little protons have been eating other things besides quarks. But there were other things that didn't add up as well, relating to spin and magnetism. Scientists are now saying that there is some sort of conspiracy in the heart and soul of the atom by which those rascally little quarks keep vanishing and refusing to show their I.D.s.

One physicist asked, "Can we say we understand the proton if we can't answer these basic questions?"

I've developed a strong affection for those rascally quarks – tweaking the noses of the physicists. It's good to see them scratching their heads in perplexity. A little awe and wonder never hurt anyone. It goes good with a glass of lemonade.